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**THE IRISH IN NORTH-EAST WALES**  
**1851 TO 1881**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool  
for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by PETER JONES

January 2002



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# INTRODUCTION

This study derives from the interest of recent years in the Irish during the late Victorian period in the smaller towns of Britain. Much work has been done on the Irish in the larger conurbations of industrial England and Scotland, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s - work that has overshadowed the experience of the Irish elsewhere, skewing the historiography and locking the migrants into a huddled mass in a northern city. However, the 'Wild Milesians' of Thomas Carlyle, living cheek - by - jowl with Engels's pig in the slums of Liverpool and Manchester, have come to be seen as less than typical of the Irish, especially the second and third generations of the migrants living in provincial towns. Furthermore, the representation of the Irish as uniformly poor, wretched and Catholic has been revised. Again, the phenomenon of 'ethnic fade' was assumed to have occurred as the nineteenth century progressed, so that after the initial troubled years, the Irish merged with the 'host' population. However, differing rates and degrees of assimilation have been revealed; indeed, religious and political differences among the Irish themselves, frequently violent in their expression, were often defining characteristics of Irishness. Following in the footsteps of micro - studies of the Irish in the regions and smaller towns, this study aims to examine the experience of the Irish in the later nineteenth century in an area hitherto neglected in the historiography, namely, North-East Wales, with particular reference to the towns of Wrexham, Mold, Holywell and Flint.

'For Wales, see England'. Nineteenth - century census takers, in classifying Wales as a region of England, frequently conflated the returns from both countries. Thus, historians seeking distinctive quantities on the Irish migration to Wales have the task of disentangling the data. (Students of Irish migration to Scotland have it

easier: Scotland was regarded as statistically separate). However, is such disentanglement necessary? Was Irish migration to Wales significantly different from that to England and to Scotland? In Britain, most work has concentrated on the larger urban areas – Liverpool, London, Manchester, Glasgow – where Irish migrants congregated in larger numbers than elsewhere. In recent years, however, smaller towns are seen to have attracted many Irish and, in this context, a study of Wales has relevance. As Paul O’Leary points out, a slight majority of Irish immigrants to Wales in the nineteenth century was to be found in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil, while the rest were scattered among villages.<sup>1</sup> Almost half, therefore, were not in the larger towns and ports of entry. The pattern of Irish immigration into Wales broadly repeated that into Britain as a whole, that is, a pre-Famine stream swollen to a flood during the Famine years with a gradual ebb thereafter. However, Wales showed a difference in that the numbers of its Irish-born declined immediately after the Famine but remained sufficiently steady between 1871 and 1901 to compensate for natural reduction through death: between 1% and 1.5% of the total population.<sup>2</sup> In other areas, too, the Irish influx into Wales was different. The Irish were not the largest group of immigrants; the English had that distinction. Yet, in South Wales at least, it was the Irish who attracted most hostility. Furthermore, for the great many Irish seeking to co-exist with the population of the smaller towns and villages, the Welsh language erected a hurdle not present in England and Scotland. In order to work and perhaps have a social life outside the immediate kinship or compatriot groups, the Irish would have needed at least a functional knowledge of Welsh. In England and Scotland, the main linguistic problems would have been those of accent and dialect rather than syntax and vocabulary. Again, religious life in

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1 P. O’Leary, *The Irish in Wales, 1792 – 1922* (U.W. Cardiff, 2000), p.4.

2 *ibid.*, p.314, Appendix 1.

nineteenth – century Wales offered an uneasy context for the predominantly Catholic Irish migrant. In England, the working class may have been steadily rejecting organised religion, but in Wales Nonconformity was pervasive and destined to be a catalyst in the Tithe War of 1886 – 91. Here, then, was yet another factor in the relationship between the Irish and the Welsh hosts.

In what ways did North-East Wales in the late nineteenth century offer the Irish migrant a context different from the rest of Wales? North-East Wales has been overshadowed by the country's south-east, particularly Monmouthshire and Glamorgan, in a manner not unlike the way in which Victorian 'shock' cities overshadowed developments in the rest of Britain. The industrial growth of the South-East was more dynamic than that of the North-East, its population was much larger, its immigration more rapid and its crucible of change more intense. The towns and villages of Denbighshire and Flintshire were much smaller and the numbers of Irish correspondingly lower. They had not sustained a tidal wave of immigration during the Famine years like that which hit Newport and Cardiff. Their Irish were mainly the generations *après le déluge*, particularly so in the town of Flint. In terms of large-scale inter-community conflict, North Wales as a whole was a much quieter place than the south of the country. For instance, between 1826 and 1882, the twenty anti-Irish riots in Wales were mainly in the South-East, while the north saw nothing like the violence against the Irish that was seen in Tredegar in 1882. Of intra – community religious conflict – Irish Catholic versus Irish Protestant – there was no demonstration, especially of the bitterness which MacRaild has shown in Victorian Cumbria<sup>3</sup> and Neal has documented for Liverpool, 1819 – 1914<sup>4</sup>.

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3 D.M. MacRaild, *Culture, Conflict and Migration*, (L.U.P., 1998).

4 F. Neal, *Sectarian Violence, the Liverpool Experience, 1819 – 1914*, (Manchester U.P., 1988)

Indeed, Orange – Green opposition occupied comparatively little space in nineteenth-century Welsh history as a whole and even less in the chronicles of North-East Wales. Why this was so is an issue for further study. North-East Wales in later Victorian times represented one of the more subtle interfaces between the Irish minority and its host community. Where the Irish were recognised as different they were not generally seen as a threat; their Catholicism might have been a target in the local press, but it co-existed peaceably enough in the street. The social and political landscape of North-East Wales did not have the darker clouds of South Wales and therefore provides a less fraught territory in which to examine the relationships between a local community and its immigrants.

This raises the question of ‘ethnic fade’, the phenomenon assumed to have been experienced by the Irish as the twentieth century approached. The concept implies a disappearance of the Irish into society, along with all other ethnic groups, so that by, say, 1910, North-East Wales was a homogenised community. Ethnicity is a process of maintaining the identity of a group whose members actively commit themselves to such process. Panikos Panayi argues that ethnicity is constantly changing in its relationship with its ambient society, maintaining that ethnic institutions can bridge the gap between a minority and its host; in short, a negotiation.<sup>5</sup> Lowe in his study of the Lancashire Irish, speaks of such institutions as means of induction into society at large.<sup>6</sup> Visions of ethnicity as cultural commerce repudiate the existence of a fixed boundary between the majority and minority Irish and, by so doing, deny the picture of an Irish ghetto with its peculiar Irish mentality.

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5 P. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism*, (Manchester, 1994)

6 W.J. Lowe, *The Irish in mid-Victorian Lancashire: the Shaping of a Working Class Community*, (New York, 1989)



In fact, the Irish were as differentiated in social class, political allegiance, religion, as were their hosts. During the period 1851 – 1881, North-East Wales was a place where the themes of integration and segregation may be considered without the drama of social upheaval such as was the background in South Wales. It certainly provided a contrast to the large conurbations to which the Irish were initially drawn, whose study has dominated the historiography until recently.

Source material on the demographic, social, economic and cultural characteristics of the Irish in small towns is limited. Press commentaries, by their nature, were edited and partisan, without any countervailing Irish Catholic voice at least until 1898 when the *Welsh Catholic Herald* appeared. Polemicists such as Henry Richard<sup>7</sup> were tendentious and scornful of the migrants, anxious to portray the Welsh in the best light. Few Irish at the time were inclined to put pen to paper – or able to – and those who did were usually in the professions and hardly representative of the majority. Later generation Irish were hardly more forthcoming. The counterpart of the ‘American letter’ did not exist in Wales so that personal accounts of migration are generally not available. It follows that students of the Irish in the small towns of the nineteenth-century Wales, being prisoners of their limited sources, are forced to rely heavily on official data, a reliance which creates difficulties in ‘humanising’ the experience of the migrants.<sup>8</sup> Qualitative evidence goes some way to doing this and account must be taken of contemporary editorial attitudes, readers’ letters, comments by the Bench, Poor Law Guardians’ concerns and police recommendations. However, for North-East Wales, source material is nowhere

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Richard, *Letters and Essays on Wales*, (London, 1884)

<sup>8</sup> Not that census enumerators were always objective: the Holywell Returns for 1871 listed a retired banker and his housekeeper, twenty-two years his junior, with the comment, ‘No affection, thank God!’

near so plentiful as it is for South Wales. This means that issues appropriate for the South must remain problematic for the North. Among these are questions concerning the socio – cultural life of the Irish. Apart from Wrexham, the numbers of Irish were comparatively small – as in Mold – or so transitory – as in Flint – that the formation of Irish ‘communities’ with concomitant records was not readily accomplished.

The Irish were not unknown in the area before the Great Famine for Irish migratory paths had been established in the area. These were through the Vale of Clwyd, where Irish agricultural workers were well known, and along the Dee Estuary to Chester with its Irish streets and parishes. Merseyside and South Lancashire were nearby with their reservoirs of Irish migrants to tap should the need arise, as indeed it did in Flint in the 1860s. Wrexham was an expanding town with a variety of trades and businesses. Mold was a settled market town with small-scale mining offering limited employment, particularly for the unskilled. Holywell had Catholic connections by virtue of its long-established shrine of Saint Winifred, but had fewer job opportunities. Flint, with its sudden burgeoning in the 1860s, was a useful contrast to the slower growth - and even decline - of the other towns. The Irish responded in their own way to the stimulus offered by each town. Mobile, clustering in their own streets, their own church growing along with their own schools, the Irish established themselves in a community which was predominantly Nonconformist, largely Welsh and, possessed of its own linguistic, religious and economic dichotomies, was itself changing in character.

In this context, the main concern of this study is to compare and contrast key features of the Irish migratory experience in four different local communities in North-East Wales, 1851 – 1881. This is done in a thematic approach which,

although not without its own limitations, allows comparisons to be made between towns rather better than treating each separately, in four portraits, town by town. The first consideration was establishing the size of the Irish populations in the towns, together with an analysis of their ages and marital status. Secondly, settlement patterns were plotted and detailed studies made of a street in Wrexham and a single Irish family. Employment was a crucial factor in motivating migration: Irish occupations were therefore a theme for study. Following this, an examination of Irish mobility was done, their movements in and out of each town being analysed on the basis of successive census enumerations. Having examined the numbers of Irish, their location and occupations, together with the degrees of their mobility, final consideration was given to the idea of an Irish 'community' in North-East Wales at this time. This entailed an evaluation of the forces of integration and segregation as manifested in the growth of the Catholic Church and denominational schooling; of the influence of the Welsh language; of the nature of Irish crime and disorder, plus local perception of them, and the attitude of the local press. Evidence – quantitative and qualitative – has been gleaned from such sources as census enumerations 1851 to 1881, contemporary press reports and comments, church marriage records, trade directories, rate assessments, public records, court transcripts, parliamentary reports and Poor Law Guardians' accounts. It is hoped that this study, set against an historiographical background of nineteenth – century Britain as a whole and Wales in particular, will contribute some detail to an emerging picture which demonstrates the diversity of the Irish migrant experience at this time.

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE IRISH IN BRITAIN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

## MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

## THE IRISH IN BRITAIN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY:

### MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

'Emigration is the great fact of Irish social history from the early nineteenth century'<sup>9</sup> Roy Foster's observation would seem uncontroversial enough, but even a cursory glance at the historiography invites the suspicion that his plain statement may well be one of the few areas wherein historians of the subject can agree. The image of the Great Famine endures - 'coffin ships' sailing on the tide together with grain-filled vessels; mass graves and evictions - but whereas such pictures are vivid in popular lore there have been contrary viewpoints. That the Famine was not a watershed is one such; that the changes wrought thereafter were subsequent not consequent is another; that the Famine ended after 'Black '47', a third.<sup>10</sup> Where such dispute can exist, the chances are slim of agreement on the causes, effects and long-term influence of the mass exodus from Ireland in the nineteenth century. The Irish left their shores in large numbers - for the New World if they had the means; if not, for Britain - and their migration and subsequent re-settlement have exercised historians ever since.

Following Roger Swift<sup>11</sup>, one can give three broad headings under which to conduct such historical debate: cause and effect; reception and perception; integration or segregation. This is a useful structure for treatment of the topic but, as Swift himself points out, it pre-supposes a homogeneity which did not exist among the Irish migrants of the time.

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9 R.F Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600 - 1972* (London, 1989), p.345.

10 C.Kinealy, *This Great Calamity, The Irish Famine, 1845-1852* (Dublin, 1994), p,xvii.

11 R.E. Swift, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914* (Historical Association, London, 1990), p.4.

They differed from each other as much as did their British 'hosts': in religion, social class, occupation, political affiliation, regional culture, and so on. Admittedly, poor Roman Catholics were the most obvious group, with the result that they were the ones who have dominated the accounts of the Irish in Britain, giving 'substance' to the stereotype of highly-fertile 'crowds of miserable Irish' in squalid ghettos where, unwelcome and unwashed, they kept pigs in their houses. The 'Little Ireland' ghetto was a potent symbol, beloved of polemicists, and one so powerful and embedded in popular memory that it may even have affected the Irish self-image. However, here again, the Irish ghetto has itself been a source of disagreement among historians as eminent as E.P. Thompson<sup>12</sup>. Did it exist or not? The apparent reassurance and certainty afforded by Foster's 'great fact of Irish social history' would therefore seem illusory. It says all and says nothing: the questions remain.

Patently then, the task of describing the Irish experience in nineteenth-century Britain is by no means a simple matter. There was, in fact, no one Irish experience for there were regional variations and changes over time, not only for the Irish but also for their British hosts. Economic and social changes throughout the century had their effect on all, including the Irish immigrants. These changes may have been slow for the Irish but they were perceptible. Indeed, claims James Walvin, by 1900 the Irish had shaken off their past and adopted British values and social practices, exchanging their rural traditions for an urban culture<sup>13</sup>. However, as a counter to this, one may cite Christine Kinealy who points out that the laws of settlement - not abolished until 1948 and technically permitting removal back to parishes of origin -

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12 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1975), p.480.

13 J. Walvin, *Passage to Britain - Immigrants in British History and Politics*, (London, 1984), p.5.

were a 'constant reminder that Irish immigrants to Britain were there as guests and not by right'<sup>14</sup>. A reminder to whom though? The Irish themselves or the populace in general? Questions spring up, hydra-headed. Who, precisely, were the migrant Irish and where did they settle? What motivated them, a need to leave Ireland or a desire to be elsewhere? Were they pushed or were they pulled? Furthermore, the focus of such questions is constantly shifting, so that we have an eminent historian of the Irish Diaspora 'convinced that emigration *as a concept* in the analysis of Irish history is virtually mined out'<sup>15</sup>.

With such a radical position being possible a mere three years after the 150th anniversary of the Great Famine, it is obvious that, in the last twenty years, great changes have taken place in the scholarship of the Irish migration. Reappraisals of the subject have produced new dimensions - national, regional and local, thematic and, not least, international. Studies published during the 1980s and 90s have done much to penetrate what has been called the 'veil of anonymity which at times has concealed the opaque society of the Irish in Britain'<sup>16</sup>. Here the work of such scholars as Graham Davis<sup>17</sup> and Donald MacRaild<sup>18</sup> has been of significance in defining a context for Irish migrants in nineteenth-century Britain. Likewise, the study of the Irish in particular locales has been given muscle and direction through

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14 C.Kinealy, *This Great Calamity* p.341.

15 D.H. Akenson, *Let's Stop Talking About Irish Emigration - Inaugural Lecture, Beamish Research Professorship of Migration Studies*, University of Liverpool, 23 November 1998 (Institute of Irish Studies, Liverpool, 1998), p.6.

16 R.E. Swift 'Historians and the Irish: Recent Writings on the Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in D.M. MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond: Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Frank Cass 2000).

17 G. Davis, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914* (Dublin, 1991).

18 D.M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* (London, 1999).

such work as that of W.J. Lowe<sup>19</sup> and Steven Fielding<sup>20</sup>, while historical societies have encouraged insights into the nineteenth-century Irish experience in smaller provincial towns and local industries<sup>21</sup>. Meanwhile, MacRaid<sup>22</sup> has provided, in his study of the Irish in Victorian Cumbria, a model for examining aspects of Irish communities hitherto largely overlooked in the historiography. Paul O'Leary has extended the view of the Irish in a regional context by his work on 'the tributary of migrants', which flowed to South Wales during the Great Famine<sup>23</sup>; on a smaller scale, the present writer has quantified and assessed the Irish presence in a North Wales town - Wrexham - from 1850 to 1880<sup>24</sup>.

The focus upon the local context has pinpointed the diversity of conditions and receptions experienced by the migrant Irish. Chinn in his work on the Birmingham Irish has demonstrated how family and employment networks determined where and how most Irish lived in the city<sup>25</sup>. Neal's study of the Irish in North-East England between 1851 and 1871<sup>26</sup>, corroborates Chinn's theme of family support, but also shows the wide distribution of Irish throughout County Durham where their mobility freed them from the monolithic economy of Tyneside. By

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19 W.J. Lowe, *The Irish in Mid- Victorian Lancashire: The Shaping of a Working Class Community* (New York, 1989).

20 S. Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1780-1939* (Buckingham, 1993).

21 For example, see, A.P. Coney, 'Mid-Nineteenth - Century Ormskirk: Disease, Overcrowding and the Irish in a Lancashire Market Town, *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, Vol.139 (1990), pp.83-111; F.J. Williams, 'Irish in the East Cheshire Silk Industry, 1851 - 1861, *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, Vol. 136(1987), pp.99-126.

22 D.M. MacRaid, *Culture, Conflict and Migration: The Irish in Victorian Cumbria* (Liverpool U.P., 1998).

23 P. O'Leary, 'A Regional Perspective: the Famine Irish in South Wales', in R.E. Swift and S. Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the Local Dimension* (Dublin, 1999), p.15.

24 P. Jones, 'The Irish in Wrexham, 1850-1880' in P.O'Leary (ed.) *Irish Migrants in Modern Wales* (Liverpool UP, 2002).

25 C. Chinn, 'Sturdy Catholic Immigrants: The Irish in Early Victorian Birmingham', in R.E. Swift and Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Victorian Britain* (1999), pp.52-74.

26 F. Neal, 'Irish Settlement in the North- East and North- West of England in the Mid- Nineteenth Century' in *The Irish in Britain: the Local Dimension* (1999 ), op. cit., pp.75-100.



contrast, John Herson has shown how in Stafford the Irish between 1841 and 1891 achieved a degree of integration and upward mobility through intermarriage with their 'hosts' and a lively response to the town's changing economic conditions<sup>27</sup>. As a theme, Irish disorders have received further attention since Swift's work earlier on the Irish in Wolverhampton and on crime and the Irish in Britain<sup>28</sup>. Mulkern has written on Irish disorders in Coventry<sup>29</sup>, Jeffes on the apparent harmony between the Irish and their Cestrian 'hosts'<sup>30</sup>, while Miskell has shown that in Camborne 'Irish rows' were essentially related to local Cornish traditions of community control through intimidation and public shame<sup>31</sup>. A collection of essays on Liverpool edited by John Belchem amply illustrates the necessity for setting public disorder in the context of local culture, mores and practices<sup>32</sup>.

The themes of diversity, identity and accommodation<sup>33</sup> have provided continuity between the scholarship of the last twenty years and that of earlier periods and perhaps cleared the way for thematic studies to emerge. Ruth-Ann Harris has shown that the significant pre - Famine migration from Ireland to Britain enabled the British workforce to move into higher status occupations<sup>34</sup>. Anne O'Dowd, in turn,

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27 J. Herson, 'Migration, "Community" or Integration? Irish Families in Victorian Stafford' in Swift and Gilley (eds) *The Irish in Victorian Britain* (1999).

28 R.E. Swift, 'Another Stafford Street Row': Law, Order and the Irish Presence in mid-Victorian Wolverhampton', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 3, No 1 (March 1984), pp5-29; 'Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain', in Swift and Gilley, (eds.), *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939*, (London 1989), pp163-182.

29 P Mulkern, 'Irish Immigrants and Public Disorder in Coventry, 1845-1875, in *Midland History*, Vol 21, (1996), pp119-135.

30 K.Jeffes, 'The Irish in Early Victorian Chester: An Outcast Community', in R.E. Swift (ed.), *Victorian Chester: Essays in Social History, 1830-1900* (Liverpool 1996) pp 85-118.

31 L. Miskell, 'Irish Immigrants in Cornwall: the Camborne Experience, 1861-1882', in Swift and Gilley, (eds.), *The Irish in Victorian Britain* (Dublin, 1999), pp31-51.

32 J. Belchem (ed.), *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History, 1790-1940* (Liverpool, 1992).

33 R.E. Swift, 'Historians and the Irish: Recent Writings on the Irish in Nineteenth - Century Britain', in D.M. MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond* (Cass, 2000).

34 Ruth-Ann M. Harris, *The Nearest Place That Wasn't Ireland: Early Nineteenth Century Labor Migration* (Ames, Iowa, 1994).

has traced the seasonal migration of Irish farm workers in Britain<sup>35</sup> while Frank Neal, in his *'Black '47'*, has examined the plight of the poor Irish at the height of the Famine and argued that outdoor relief, while not lavish, was not a burden on the poor rates but was doled out even-handedly, saving the lives of many of the desperate migrants<sup>36</sup>. In addition to these national, regional, local and thematic aspects, an international dimension to Irish studies in the last two decades has been developed by such scholars as O'Sullivan<sup>37</sup> and Akenson<sup>38</sup> whose panoramic view of the Irish diaspora could counter any tendency towards parochialism inherent in local, more sharply focused, studies.

Recent research may have framed new questions and have established new viewpoints, but one fact remains, caught in verse as though in epitaph, 'Poor Pat must emigrate'. And emigrate he did - and so did Bridget, with or without him - with almost five million leaving from 1700 to 1876. Early emigration figures are unreliable but estimates put the annual rate in the eighteenth century at 2,500 - part, as it was, of a long tradition of migration out of Ireland to Britain stretching back through the Middle Ages. As though a prelude to the Great Famine, a million left in the thirty years from 1815 to 1845. Thereafter, by 1851, a further one and a half million had departed with 'pestilence on their backs and famine in their stomachs' and in the following twenty years the average rate of leaving rounded out to 100,000<sup>39</sup>.

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35 Ann O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers: History and Folklore of the Irish Migratory Agricultural Worker in Ireland and Britain* (Dublin, 1991).

36 F. Neal, *Black '47: Britain and the Famine Irish* (London, 1997).

37 P. O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity* (6 Vols.) (Leicester, London and New York, 1990 - 1996).

38 D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Belfast, 1996).

39 C. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity* (1994), p.297.

An Irish diaspora had been created whose political effects continued to make themselves felt at the dawn of the twentieth century. In 'The Nation' of 17th December 1870, Donegal-born Isaac Butt (1813 - 1880) articulated a growing Irish self-awareness concerning Home Rule and hinted darkly at the power of the diaspora:

they were not to crouch and whine at the feet of England, but to demand by moral force, their rights, and moral force was always strong when physical force was behind it. That physical force consisted in the existence of twelve millions of Irishmen scattered over the globe, whom England might unite in friendly federation, or whom she might make her foes.<sup>40</sup>

The United States of America received most of the Irish Famine outpouring, with Britain second. 1861 was the census year showing the highest number of Irish-born in England, Wales and Scotland in the period 1841 - 1901 as the following table shows:

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<sup>40</sup> 'The Nation' 17 Dec. 1870, quoted in A. O'Day, (ed.), *A Survey of the Irish in England 1870* by Hugh Heinrich (Hambledon Press, 1990).

Table 1: The Irish-Born in England, Wales and Scotland, 1841 - 1901

Year	England and Wales	%	Scotland	%	Total
1841	289,404	1.8	126,321	4.8	415,725
1851	519,959	2.9	207,367	7.2	727,326
1861	601,634	3.0	204,083	6.7	805,717
1871	566,540	2.5	207,770	6.2	774,310
1881	562,374	2.2	218,745	5.9	781,119
1891	458,315	1.6	194,807	4.8	653,122
1901	426,565	1.3	205,064	4.8	631,629

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1841 - 1901; Census of Scotland, 1841-1901.

These figures exclude the Irish immigrants' children born in Britain, only those reported as having been born in Ireland being recorded as Irish. The others were deemed to be English and Welsh or Scottish. Ethnic Irish communities would therefore have been much larger than these statistics show.

Clearly, Irish communities were not merely the total of Irish -born living in them and any figures dealing with the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain must be treated with caution. *The Nation* in 1872 suggested that census figures should be doubled to give the true size of the Irish population of Britain, an assertion with which a much later commentator, W.J. Lowe, largely agrees<sup>41</sup>. In his study of seven Lancashire towns from the mid-1840s to the 1870s, Lowe proposes a 'Widnes Factor' that can be applied to Irish communities as listed by the census to help estimate their actual sizes. In evolving his 'Widnes Factor', Lowe took all the households with at least one other Irish-born person in addition to the household head in a nuclear or extended family.

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41 W.J. Lowe, *The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: The Making of a Working Class Community* (New York, 1989).

If the household head was the only person born in Ireland this household was omitted from the calculations, two persons in a household therefore constituting the minimum Irish presence. For 1861 and 1871, Lowe gives minimum Irish populations in the town of 1,621 and 4,136 - 77% and 80% more than those enumerated as having been born in Ireland. This 'Widnes Factor' may not provide the actual number of Irish community members in mid-Victorian Lancashire but it does, at least for Lowe, give a structure on which to base a 'systematic and credible estimate' and one simple enough to translate to other Irish studies.

Contemporary observers can complement census figures but, while no statistics can be entirely reliable, one should be especially mindful of deliberate or unwitting tendentiousness in the writings of commentators of the time. At the very least, their evaluations and opinions provide valuable qualitative evidence to counterpoint and colour quantitative information. One such commentator was John Denvir who, in his *The Irish in Britain* of 1892, gave some pre-Famine population figures which differentiated between England and Wales and Scotland and between males and females. It is a significant point that he touches upon in this because most European emigrants were males going alone, sending for families later. The Irish were different in that most (almost half) of the emigrants were lone women. Denvir gave the following figures:

Table 2: The Irish-born in Britain 1841

Parts of Britain	Irish	Irish-born	Total Irish	%	Total Population
England	148,151	135,977	284,128	1.9	14,995,138
Wales	3,080	2,196	5,276	0.6	911,603
Scotland	66,502	59,819	126,321	4.8	2,620,184
'The Islands'	1,664	1,867	3,531	2.8	124,040
Totals	219,397	199,859	419,256	2.2	18,650,965

Source: J. Denvir *The Irish in Britain* (1894)<sup>42</sup>

Denvir, good nationalist that he was, comments that the Great Famine affected the lives not only of those left behind in Ireland, but also of those already in Britain. Generous to a fault, the Irish in Britain so helped the incomers that they themselves were reduced to the level of the poor immigrants. The Irish, according to Denvir, were clawing their way up the social ladder only to be impeded by their lately-arrived compatriots:

At this time a fair proportion of our countrymen in Liverpool, as in other parts of Great Britain, were making progress in life as mechanics, shopkeepers, merchants, and professional men ...<sup>43</sup>

An attempt perhaps to counter the usual portrayal of the Irish as lumpen labourers, but one more partisan than realistic. Alan O'Day comments, 'Modern writers, while recognising Denvir's point, have confirmed that Irish advancement was painfully slow'.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, this 'upward mobility' 'has been identified, by Kerby Miller for one, as a significant factor influencing the exodus from Ireland. Miller sees greater social and economic aspirations among some Irish - the Ulster Protestants in

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42 John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain* (London, 1894) p.114.

43 *ibid.*, p.109.

44 A. O'Day, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.xxvii.

particular -before the Great Famine. Such aspirations could not be satisfied in Ireland,<sup>45</sup> but in more distant places they could, in Liverpool, for example. Whilst the popular image of the Liverpool-Irish is one of strong arms and broad backs labouring on the quayside, there was another picture to be had which tends to support Miller's argument. In 1836, the Royal Commission on the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland accepted the testimony of Samuel Holme, a Liverpool builder, that, in 1834, 10.4% of the city's 7,500 Irish workforce were 'mechanics of various sorts' and that 31.3% were in semi-skilled occupations such as those of sugar boilers, sawyers and brick makers. According to Holme therefore, only 58.3% of Irish labour in Liverpool were in the lowest form of work<sup>46</sup>. Thirty-six years later, Hugh Heinrick was at pains to provide the antidote 'to the fictions of insolent libellers who deny that the Irish people possess the qualities essential to material success'<sup>47</sup>. In Liverpool - 'the great emporium of British commerce' - one meets, Heinrick contended,

...with Irish merchants and Irish manufacturers - Irish doctors and Irish lawyers - Irish tradesmen and businessmen of all classes - Irish priests and Irish teachers - to be counted by the score. Here the Irish people are represented on every local Board and Committee - even to the bench of magistrates. Here is an Irish power ramifying through every class and grade in the body social and the body politic - so strongly rooted and broadly spread that no power and no interest in the town can declare itself independent of it<sup>48</sup>.

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45 K.A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford, 1985), pp.267-280.

46 P.P. (1836) Reports on the state of the Irish Poor in Great Britain. Appendix II: the State of the Irish Poor in Liverpool, p.39.

47 H. Heinrick in O'Day, op. cit., p.87.

48 *ibid.*, p.87.

In a flush of statistical enthusiasm, Heinrick estimated the Irish population in Liverpool as 180,500 out of a total of 500,000, or 36%. He broke this figure down to show that approximately 20% of his compatriots were 'above the ranks of ordinary toil':

Merchants/1 <sup>st</sup> Class Positions	300	Commercial Assistants	2,000
2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Positions	1,500	Professions	800
Shopkeepers	3,500	Market and Street Sellers	2,000
Clerks	3,500	Misc. Non-Manual	2,500
Master Porters etc.	2,500	Unskilled Manual	146,900
Artisans	15,000	Total	180,500 <sup>49</sup>

This was the picture in 1872 as presented by a less than objective observer to a readership, *The Nation*, not averse to a success story featuring their own kind. However, despite dubious sources of information and perhaps statistical massage, Heinrick had made his point. Swarming with Irish life though the Liverpool docks undoubtedly were, the Irish eventually, over generations, made their way into the higher echelons and into positions of autonomy. But it took time. As W.J. Lowe sums up the Irish experience in mid-Victorian Lancashire:

...by the 1870s, the statistics that are available indicate that the Irish distinctiveness as problems in any of these dimensions, housing conditions, poor relief and arrests, diminished with time, which is also an indicator that even if they had not achieved clear upward occupational mobility, their situation had stabilised for the better.<sup>50</sup>

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49 *ibid.*, pp.90-91.  
50 W.J. Lowe, *op. cit.*, p.103.



James Walvin, it will be recalled, gave the Irish another twenty to thirty years, a generation, to shake off their past.

So far the statistics of Irish immigration have yielded percentages of a low order so that it would appear that reactions to the Irish were born not of large overall numbers but of local densities. The highest figures for the period 1841 - 1901 are, for England and Wales, 3% in 1861 and, for Scotland, 7.2% in 1851. Similarly, Denvir quotes 4.8% for Scotland and 2.2% for the whole of Britain. It is in their local conglomerations that the Irish achieved their visibility. They were to be found largely in the ports of entry, notably Liverpool and Glasgow; in the industrial towns of South Lancashire and Scotland; in the Midlands and South Wales; and, of course, in London. This was a distribution to be found before the Great Famine and confirmed by the 1851 census:

*Table 3: The Percentage of the Irish-born in the Populations of 3 Scottish and 4 English Counties, plus 4 Urban Areas in 1851.*

Scottish Counties		English Counties		Urban Areas	
Renfrewshire	14.8%	Lancashire	8.9%	Liverpool	22.3% (83,813 in number)
Lanarkshire	14.6%	Cheshire	5.7%	Glasgow	18.1% (59,801 in number)
Wigtownshire	12.3%	Durham	5.4%	Manchester	13.1% (52,504 in number)
		Cumberland	5.1%	London	4.6% (108,548 <sup>51</sup> in number)

*Source:* R.E. Swift, *The Irish in Britain, 1851 – 1914*, (1990), p.12.

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51 R.E. Swift, (1990), op. cit. p.12.

The four conurbations during the period 1841 to 1871 contained an average of 41% of the total Irish-born settlers in Britain as a whole<sup>52</sup>, but, although the largest numbers were in London, the Irish would have made the greater impression on their local communities in the other cities where the total populations were smaller. These percentages in some ways suggest concentrations and communities of Irish that may not in fact have existed, at least in permanent form. In 1851 and 1861, thirty-one towns recorded Irish-born populations of one thousand or more, some not normally thought of as having Irish associations, such as Bath, Derby and Shropshire's Newport. The work of Herson on nineteenth-century Stafford provides a 'counterpoint to the big-city studies' and highlights the phenomenon of in-and-out migration and its relationship to occupational status, family contacts and responsibilities, and even to the generosity of the local Poor Law Guardians<sup>53</sup>. Herson computes a net migration for Stafford, 1841 to 1851, of +370; 1851 to 1861, of -2; and for 1861 to 1871, of -119. Such work focuses upon the Irish as a changing element of population and provides an antidote to the 'snapshot' pictures inherent in ten-year census findings. Much movement was going on throughout the century within and between British towns and cities. Add to this the overall growth in population and the consequent reduction by percentage concentration of Irish communities and, as Graham Davis argues in his essay, 'Little Irelands', the response to the Irish presence can be seen as 'perceived in simple alarmist terms, not at all a reflection of the actual scale and complexity of the process'<sup>54</sup>.

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52 D.M. MacRaild (1999), p.55.

53 J. Herson, 'Irish Migration and Settlement in Victorian Britain: a small-town perspective' in Swift and Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* (London, 1989), p.93.

54 G. Davis in Swift and Gilley (1989), *ibid.*, p.106.

Table 4: The Irish-born as a percentage of the total population of London, 1841 – 1861.

Year	Total Population	Irish-born	as % of total population
1841	1,897,436	74,000	3.9
1851	2,359,739	108,548	4.6
1861	2,812,605	106,879	3.8 <sup>55</sup>

Source: G. Davis in Swift and Gilley (1989), p.106.

An even distribution of the Irish throughout the capital would have greatly reduced their 'visibility'.

Davis goes on to quote Alan Armstrong's *Stability and Change in the English Country Town* (1974) on the growth of York and the contribution of the Irish to that growth. Even in York, a town which by 1851 had received an increase in its Irish contingent greater than many comparable northern towns, the growth was due largely to immigrants from England, Wales and Scotland. By 1851, the Irish were 20.1% of York's in-migrants:

Table 5: The Irish-born as a percentage of the total population of York, 1841 – 1851.

Year	Population	Irish-born	% of Population
1841	28,842	429	1.5
1851	36,303	1,928	5.3
1841 – 51 Increase	7,461	1,499	20.1 <sup>56</sup>

Source: G. Davis in Swift and Gilley (1989), p.107.

55 *ibid.*, p.106.

56 *ibid.*, p.107.

The figures Davis gives for Preston provide an even less alarmist picture than mythology would have it:

Table 6: The Irish-born in Preston, 1841-1861			
Year	Population	Irish-born	Irish-born as % of Total Population
1841	50,088	1,703	3.4
1851	69,216	5,122	7.4
1861	83,023	6,974	8.4
1841 - 51 Increase	19,128	3,519	18.4
1851 - 61 Increase	13,807	1,905	13.8 <sup>57</sup>

Source: G. Davis in Swift and Gilley (1989), p.107.

It seems that over 40% of Preston's population in 1851 came from a ten-mile radius of the town and about 30% from their birthplaces thirty miles away: ‘... a tidal ebb and flow...’ everywhere being submerged in a broader inrush of migration from the countryside to the towns<sup>58</sup>. Later in the century from 1871 to 1901, the Irish-born in England and Wales fell steadily from 2.49% to 1.31% and in Scotland from 6.18% to 4.59%. The numbers for England and Wales went down during this period from 566,540 to 426,565 and for Scotland from 207,770 to 205,064. Looking twenty years on, to 1921, it can be seen that the proportion of Irish in the population of England and Wales fell from 1:40 to 1:100.<sup>59</sup>

57 Davis gives as his source, M. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambs, 1971).

58 *ibid.*, p.107.

59 D. Fitzpatrick, ‘A Curious Middle Place’, in Swift and Gilley (1989), *op. cit.*, p.11.

Figures such as these were not generally available at the time and Victorians' perception of the situation was worlds apart from statistical evidence. They saw what they saw: Irish ghettos, Irish drunkenness and violence rife in Irish slums wherein were bred Fenian sedition and Roman Catholic alienation. Furthermore, the Irish, they believed, kept wages down. Between the image of the Irish ghetto and statistical fact lies the difference between qualitative and quantitative evidence - territory both rich and fraught.

So far, by way of introduction, we have touched upon the questions of the distribution and density of the nineteenth-century Irish settlement in Britain. Census figures and contemporary responses have been invoked, as have Irish stereotypes and the Irish experience of large and small urban areas. However, - and to return to Swift's three broad headings given at the beginning - no study of the mid-nineteenth century Irish immigration can ignore its causes. Its effects are no doubt more significant in the context of this study than its causes, but the Irish experience is a compound of perception and reception, fact and myth, escape and aspiration. All these conspired to create an Irish cast of mind for the next 150 years. Why did so many millions leave Ireland between 1820 and 1910? After all, in the main, they were exchanging rural poverty for the urban variety. Was the reason the Malthusian one: an outmoded agrarian economy unable to cope with a rapidly expanding population? Many regarded Ireland's problematic agronomy as the result of an outdated system of land tenure and a reluctance to invest in farms, which were too small to yield worthwhile profit. Allied to this, it was thought, over-population was not unconnected with Roman Catholic belief and practice. Given such backwardness, the calamity of 1845 - 52 was considered inevitable and mass emigration the only

escape from it.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, the Great Famine accelerated emigration; it did not create it. The explanations for the migration are more complex than the Malthusian model would imply. The Irish diet was far healthier than that of many European peasants and dependence on the potato did not mean malnutrition. Agriculture was slowly moving from corn to horn and farms were gradually being consolidated so that many smallholders and cottiers were rendered landless and homeless. Labour was becoming less necessary on farms and, inexorably, poverty spread, though more so in some parts than in others. The Gaelic - speaking west was especially vulnerable.

Emigration from Ireland had existed before the Famine exodus beginning in 1846, perhaps activated by what David Fitzpatrick has termed the 'push' factor and certainly not confined to the poorer areas<sup>61</sup>. Ulster was a comparatively wealthy part of Ireland and provided most migrants for the growing industrialisation of Britain and America. Material improvement, not economic survival, was the motivation of such migrants. Again, there is an argument which says that expansion of the British economy by the 1830s enabled the English worker to undertake skilled industrial work not previously required<sup>62</sup>. The Irish migration filled the gap left by the 'upwardly-mobile' English workforce and thereby became necessary to the growth of the economy. As one revisionist has said, 'It seems likely, therefore, that the Irish immigration encouraged a more rapid accumulation of skills among the non-Irish

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60 See J.A Jackson, for example, *The Irish in Britain* (London, 1963) p.1-5.

61 D. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration, 1801-1921* (Dublin, 1984), p.26.

62 Ruth-Ann M. Harris, *The Nearest Place That Wasn't Ireland: Early Nineteenth Century Labor Migration* (Iowa State University, 1994).

than would have taken place in the absence of the Irish.<sup>63</sup> For the rest, potato blight was a catalyst of the process, looming impoverishment its driving force.

The shortest distance between two points was also a fundamental determinant of the route taken. In the main, Ulster and North Connacht migrants went via Londonderry and Belfast to Scotland; those from South Connacht and North Leinster opted for the Dublin to Liverpool and Holyhead routes, while those from South Leinster and Munster took the route from Cork via Bristol to London. How far the migrants' final destination was decided by the route taken and their regional origin is open to question, but we do know that places of origin were significant in that they could dictate the skills and employment chances of the migrant. For instance, the York Irish, who were mainly from predominantly agricultural Mayo and Sligo, found themselves in a restricted labour market: it was the chicory fields for them with a daily twenty-mile walk to and from work. Poverty, poor accommodation and residential immobility were the features of their lives. In Bristol, on the other hand, the Irish derived mainly from the Dublin, Cork and Waterford areas and brought with them trades more easily absorbed in the city's more varied labour market. We do not always know - from census returns at least - whence the migrants came. They may well have shared a common cause for their abandonment of Ireland but poverty alone would not be sufficient to explain why one place rather than another was chosen to seek a new life. Apart from the ferry fare, motivation, information and health are needed for emigration to take place; family and cultural connections also help. Information about an area reduces risk and saves time, while knowledge that blood ties and cultural bonds exist in a particular place inspires confidence.

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63 J.G. Williamson, 'The Impact of the Irish on British Labour Markets during the Industrial Revolution', in Swift and Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Britain, 1815 - 1939* (London, 1989), p.159.

So the causes of Irish emigration were not simply economic: established routes were followed, destinations often pre-determined. Mediaeval Irish had crossed the sea and by the eighteenth century many English towns had their Irish contingents. The Irish had stayed on after seasonal harvesting and construction work or their stint in the army. Many intending to 'step' on to the Americas or Australia had instead stayed either because they lacked the necessary funds or the necessary information. This last - the intelligence - was as important as the remittance it often arrived with and, alongside expectations about improved income, must be given equal weight in assessing the factors involved in emigrants' decisions to go. With information, a leap in the dark can become a step in clear daylight: The 'American Letter' would be eagerly awaited, for its monetary value as much as for its news of relatives. An estimated £34 million arrived in Britain between 1848 and 67 - much of it going to Ireland - and information can cut the costs of searching for a job in a new country<sup>64</sup> so that even though income differentials between the native and the host countries can level out with time, migration can continue through the power of information, established local connections and increased confidence.

A British Parliamentary Paper' of 1854 illustrates this point. R.J.

O'Shaughnessy, the Clerk to the Cork Union, is giving his evidence:

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<sup>64</sup> D. Baines, 'European emigration, 1815-1930', in *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 3, (1994) p.526-7.



How many have left Cork in the last twelvemonths? One thousand per week it is so stated.

Taking the diminution of population into consideration, the stream of emigration flows on almost as broadly and steadily as ever? Yes.

What class of persons? The industrious and the well-intentioned classes.

Is it not the general tendency of the lower class of Irish at the present moment to take their families to America? Yes, they look upon it as the greatest blessing to get to America.

Because of the number of relatives who are already in America? I think so.<sup>65</sup>

This is, of course, 'chain' migration whereby migrants follow friends and relatives to a particular place. Such movement is affected by 'push and pull' factors, both economic and political, and is also influenced by enabling factors such as the all-important one - the growth and improvement of transport. The first steam packet, the 'Rob Roy', established a ferry service between Belfast and Glasgow in 1818 and within the next decade ferries were plying between Dublin, Cork and Liverpool. These steam ferries brought regularity, frequency, speed and cheapness to the Irish Sea crossings and, with steerage passengers being charged 10d and deck passengers 3d, it is small wonder that Liverpool alone received 111,905 Irish in the first six months of 1848. Another enabling factor must surely be what Panikos Panayi identifies as the potency of the idea of emigration<sup>66</sup>. In this, Panayi even goes so far as to endorse M.L. Hansen's view that emigration came to be seen as the cure for all ills, private and public<sup>67</sup>, a 'craze' which was fuelled by the advertising of the shipping companies and their agents.

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65 PP 1854 XVII, Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal, p.77, para. 921

66 P. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945* (Manchester UP., 1994), p35

67 *ibid.*, p.35.

The historiography of the Irish migration to Britain in the nineteenth century raises many questions - of extent, of density and pattern of settlement, of categories of employment, and so on. Evaluations of the Irish migration have been revised over the years, not least through the re-examination of stereotypes. Inevitably, the larger concentrations of Irish have received most attention - Liverpool, Manchester, London, Glasgow - at the expense of the less-Irish places. Distortions and misinterpretations have occurred. Other themes have been neglected, for example, Irish Protestants and Irish women. However, a measure of the success of Irish immigration in the nineteenth century was the degree of assimilation into the host community. It is to this that we now turn.

This aspect of Irish immigration has engaged historians perhaps more than any other. To take but three: Lynn Lees in 1979 saw successive generations of London Irish clinging to their past (at least until 1871, the last year of her study)<sup>68</sup>; O'Tuathaigh in 1981 saw some integration but also a resistance from the host community<sup>69</sup>; and Lowe in 1989 perceived the Irish in Lancashire, especially those English-born, as having looked and behaved more like the population in general', that is, achieving a substantial level of community confidence and accomplishment'<sup>70</sup>. In short, a range of opinion and interpretation is evident.

How separate, then, were the Irish from their nineteenth-century host communities and how far did they achieve assimilation as time went by? E.P. Thompson admitted segregation but denied the existence of the Irish ghetto:

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68 L.H. Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester, 1979).

69 M.A.G. O'Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain: Problems of Integration.' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xxxi (1981), pp.149- 174.

70 W.J. Lowe, *The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire* (New York, 1989).

If they were segregated in some towns, the Irish were never pushed back into ghettos. It would have been difficult to have made a people who spoke the same language and were British citizens under the Act of Union into a subject minority.<sup>71</sup>

Thompson may have been right for reasons - peculiarly his own - which were not perhaps without their touch of idealism. For him, the main inhibitors of Irish ghetto membership were the common constituents of language, citizenship and working class solidarity; a kind of wider proletarian brotherhood. Ten years later, J.M. Werly unequivocally repudiated Thompson's claim: the Irish did live in ghettos, at least in Manchester from 1832 to 1849<sup>72</sup>. He, in turn, was rejected in 1992 by Busteed, Hodgson and Kennedy. Werly, they said, had presented a collection of '...adverse comments on the Irish ... in the 1830s -40s, with little critical evaluation'<sup>73</sup>. This is a point made most recently by MacRaild<sup>74</sup>. Engel's pig, Carlyle's wild Milesians, A.B. Reach's Halifax Irish fleeing the horrors of sanitary improvements; the findings of Kay and Mayhew: the reportage of such as these provided powerful images which led to an iconography only now being re-examined. Contemporary commentators encouraged the idea of the Irish as set apart and a problem, thus setting in train an historiography dominated by the period 1830-1860. Thus, 'ghetto' is part of this tradition and thus also the argument swings to and fro, to be resolved only by a more exact definition of the word 'ghetto'; or its abandonment.

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71 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1968), p.480.

72 J.M. Werly, *Irish Historical Studies*, vii (1973), pp.345-358.

73 M.A. Busteed, R.I. Hodgson and T.F. Kennedy, 'The Myth and Reality of Irish Migrants in mid-Nineteenth Century Manchester', in P. O'Sullivan (ed.) *The Irish In the New Communities* (Leicester, 1992), p.48.

74 D.M. MacRaild, *Immigrants and Minorities*. Vol.14, No.1, March 1995, pp.67-85.

Fitzpatrick in his essay, 'A Curious Middle Place', points out that the reluctant immigrants of 1821 - 71 had their stay in Britain distorted by insecure employment in the most menial jobs and that this warped occupational distribution was reflected in their settlement patterns<sup>75</sup>. He repudiates the existence of the ghetto but sees instead clusters of Irish in the over-populated and decaying parts of most British towns among which they moved with startling rapidity from one insalubrious lodging to another<sup>76</sup>. That is, the Irish were not confined with no contact with the wider community. Others like Pooley, concur - there were areas of Irish concentration but not total isolation, geographical or occupational. In London and Liverpool, many Irish lived in areas of predominantly English occupancy and, in the seven towns studied by Pooley, 17% to 40% of Irish immigrants were in skilled employment<sup>77</sup>, and, by implication, with access to better housing among the better-off of the community.

The work of Finnegan on York<sup>78</sup>, Lees on London<sup>79</sup> and Papworth on Liverpool<sup>80</sup> tends to support this analysis - that the Irish poor lived with the English poor and the upwardly-mobile Irish with their English counterparts elsewhere. This would seem to be echoed in the small towns, e.g. Stafford, where Herson found the Irish spatially scattered according to economic factors and the phenomenon of out-migration. Irish communities there may have been but membership did not depend on a strict residential qualification<sup>81</sup>.

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75 D. Fitzpatrick in R.E. Swift and S. Gilley, (1989), op. cit., p.10.

76 ibid. p10.

77 C.G. Pooley, 'Segregation or Integration? The Residential Experience of the Irish mid-Victorian Britain' in Swift and Gilley, ibid. p70.

78 F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prejudice: Irish Immigrants in York, 1840 - 75* (Cork 1982).

79 L. Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Immigrants in Victorian London* (Manchester 1979).

80 J. Papworth, *The Irish in Liverpool, 1835 - 72* (Ph.D. thesis, Liverpool 1981), cited in Swift and Gilley, op. cit. (1989).

81 J. Herson, op. cit. in Swift and Gilley (1989), p.85.

In his study of mid-Victorian Lancashire, W.J. Lowe discerned a distinctive, two-sided profile to the Irish. They were initially a group apart but eventually an integral part of Lancashire life. In the Famine years, the Irish arriving in Liverpool and South Lancashire were indeed a health hazard and a burden on the Poor Rate; they did provide the police with regular work; they did live in poor housing. However, even by the 1850s things were changing and there was developing a truly Lancashire-Irish community. Their housing had improved and their employment networks had been created. The Irish migrants, many of whom had known nothing but rural poverty, had become by the 1870s integrated urban dwellers. This was a process affected in its growth by the Roman Catholic parish church, or what Lowe terms an organisational building block for their community life<sup>82</sup>. This church affiliation served two purposes: supporting the immigrant in a strange and often hostile environment and, at the same time, providing the organisational experience so necessary to modern social and political life and to an eventual integration with the host community. Besides all of which, and at a more mundane level, Lowe points out that the Irish and their Lancashire hosts were not so residentially segregated that they lived separate lives. With so much transience and short-term occupancy, especially in the 1840s and 50s, with movement in and out of houses and streets, spatial admixture was unavoidable.

If Irish ghettos did not exist, Irish minorities did; but not so distinctively that questions concerning their nature and location could not arise. O'Tuathaigh has two types of minority: one which refuses integration and seeks to maintain its own

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82 W.J. Lowe, *op. cit.*(1989), p.206.

identity and another which is refused such by the host community<sup>83</sup>. The Irish, he says, were both refusers and refused. This is a case also argued by Steven Fielding when he says that Irish Catholic immigrants wanted neither full assimilation nor complete separation from English society<sup>84</sup>. Where integration occurred, it did so through economic aspiration and achievement; where not, the causes may have been more complex. Not least among these causes was self-segregation - a function compounded of religion, politics, cultural difference, ethnicity. Kinship bonds were strong in Irish areas and persisted long after the initial years of migration to Britain. Psychologically and geographically the Irish were too close to 'home' to feel a great urge to be assimilated: a short sea passage and a cheap deck fare made Irishness an easily-sustainable quality. Besides, England was only a step on the way to America or the Antipodes so that, for those intent upon and able to travel farther afield, there was little incentive to exchange identities. For those whose dreams of the New World had been dashed, the bitter pillow of disappointment could be sugared by clinging to one's Irishness, even though it meant being more anti-Albion than pro-Erin. Furthermore, the Irish, Catholic and Protestant, gained control over certain areas of employment - the Merseyside docks and shipyards and the building trade, for instance - and the 'job security' offered by such Hibernian closed shops could be deemed preferable to trying one's luck in the mines of Pennsylvania or the stockyards of Chicago even though this meant existing wretchedly in a 'Little Ireland'.

Manchester has perhaps contributed more than most places to the mythology of the Irish ghetto with the 1836 Report on the State of the Irish Poor as its chief

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83 M.G.A. O'Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain: Problems of Integration', in Swift and Gilley (eds.) *The Irish in Victorian City* (1985) pp13-36.

84 S. Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1880-1939* (Open University Press 1993). See also R.E. Swift in *Irish Historical Studies* (May 1993) p331.

chronicle. Among the details of open sewers, unpaved streets, barren damp interiors, the Report gives the evidence of one, James Butterworth, a local pawnbroker, who succinctly and graphically comments on the social profile of the enclave: 'There are very few Irish with whom the English mix; it is like oil and water'. Not much sign of integration there. And before the 1836 Report there was Dr Kay's pamphlet on the 1832 cholera epidemic. Kay was undoubtedly a key influence in identifying the Irish presence with the evil effects of squalid living conditions. Others followed his lead - the polemicist Engels, novelists Disraeli and Gaskell painting distressing pictures of decay, pollution, overcrowding and universal wretchedness. After Kay came Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 and Lyon Playfair in the 1840s. With a population of only 2,000, Manchester's Little Ireland had more than its fair share of attention and coloured perceptions for generations to come.

J.M. Werly notes all this as evidence that the Irish lived physically separate from the English. He also finds cause to say that they were culturally apart. He speaks of ghettos delimited physically by location and material deprivation and institutionally by cultural factors such as church and employment<sup>85</sup>. He quotes Engels in the Forties: 'Some four thousand people, mostly Irish, inhabit the slum ... A horde of ragged women and children swarm about the streets and they are just as dirty as the pigs which wallow happily on the heaps of garbage and in the pools of filth'<sup>86</sup>. He cites Kay's portrait of the Irk as a river which 'receives excrementitious matter from sewers...' <sup>87</sup> and the contention of John Robertson, surgeon of the Manchester lying-in hospital, 'that the majority of the city's cellar dwellings, I incline

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85 J.M. Werly, I.H.S.,(1973), op. cit., p.347.

86 F. Engels, *The Condition of the English Working Class* (published, Germany, 1845), cited p.347.

87 *ibid.*, p.347.

to think, are inhabited by Irish'<sup>88</sup> Add to this a dominant church and an economic concentration in unskilled employment and, for Werly, Irish isolation was incontrovertible.

Given a physical dimension to the Manchester Irish ghetto and a corresponding institutional isolation, a developing Irish sense of community was understandable. There were solidarity and support in the neighbourhood drawing on memories of old Ireland for the Irish-born and on daily street acquaintance for the second and third generations. Bonds were forged through working together, attending church together, enjoying an evening pint and a 'crack' together. This is how Werly sees the Manchester Irish of the 1830s and this how he arrives at his conclusion that, despite Thompson, the Irish were indeed pressed back into ghettos where they kept through demoralisation, religious ties and English resentment at their economic competition. However, as has been noted, Werly had been criticised for his unquestioning acceptance of contemporary mid-century comments on the urban Irish, comments made at a time when 'the condition of England' question was much in people's minds. He may indeed have accepted contemporary evidence too readily and limited his view to Manchester, 'the city where most of the stereotypes originated or gained credence'<sup>89</sup>.

The questioning by Busteed and his colleagues of Werly's stance epitomises a necessary process of historical evaluation. They re-examined the Manchester Irish and found them to be concentrated in three areas even before the Famine of 1845-52: off the Oxford Road in Ancoats and in New Town in the north-east. These

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88 *ibid.* p.349.

89 Busteed et al, in P. O'Sullivan, *op. cit.* (1992), p.26.



concentrations and their unavoidable squalor gave the Irish a symbolic significance, reinforced in the public imagination by Kay's 1832 report and subsequent writings. Repetition of the stereotype made it gospel at a time when a certain racism may have been developing<sup>90</sup>, fed, deliberately or incidentally, by Kay to support his public health reforms, by Engels for political reasons and, later in the mid 1860s, by Fenian activities in mainland Britain.

Taking some thirty acres near Victoria Station, Busteed and his colleagues found, from the 1851 census returns, that 42.2% of the area's population was Irish-born and 50.4% English-born of Irish parents. Of the 89 streets involved, 41 had an Irish majority; 6 had no Irish and 2 were all Irish. Thirty-eight percent of the 1,209 houses enumerated were Irish houses. It would therefore seem that the Irish lived alongside those of similar economic status, even though at a greater density. Few were totally Irish or non-Irish and even in this poverty-stricken area there were some Irish employers, if only a few<sup>91</sup>. In short, this examination of mid-nineteenth century Manchester unearthed sufficient data, if not to refute the ghetto image entirely, at least to question its validity. As Busteed concludes,

...the degree to which, and the processes whereby, the Irish adapted to life in the industrial urban areas...were more varied and complex than a reading of the comments of the early observers and the myths to which...they contributed would lead one to suppose.<sup>92</sup>

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90 S. Gilley, 'The Irish', in *History Today*, 35, June 1985, p.19, cited in Busteed, *ibid.*, p.31.

91 Busteed et al, *op. cit.*, p.46.

92 *ibid.* p.47.

It is important, of course, in any study of a specific area to know where to draw the boundary lines. There is always a danger of self-fulfilling prophecy. Pooley warns of this in his study of the Irish in Liverpool and Lancaster in the mid-nineteenth century<sup>93</sup> in which he finds Irish residence more dependent on economic considerations than on ethnic differences. In Liverpool, Irish skilled and white-collar workers were widely distributed throughout the city but in mainly middle-class areas. Similarly in Lancaster: non-manual workers were more widespread than the Irish unskilled. Skilled Irish lived in the front streets with skilled non-Irish; all the unskilled were in the back streets. This implies integration rather than segregation. However, Pooley admits that there was some 'clustering' in some streets; despite this, total isolation was not possible for nowhere was the host community far away. Daily intercourse at work and in the streets would have denied complete segregation, a finding that accords with Lowe's in Lancashire. E.P. Thompson would have none of ghettos. Later scholarship has favoured the term 'clusters' instead. However, both terms imply a specific location for the Irish 'Community', and though less geographically referenced, both call up a picture of a group of people particular in time and place. It is significant therefore that the term 'network' is gaining currency in the whole 'ghetto' debate, suggesting as it does, less of place and more of social intercourse. It would seem therefore to be a more appropriate term at a time when emphasis has moved from the identification of physical locations to the recognition of psychological and social differences and similarities within the host-immigrant relationship. Mapping Little Ireland is less important now than examining the nature and degree of Irish 'outcastness'. However, useful as the term 'network' may be in

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93 C.G. Pooley, in Swift and Gilley (1989), *op. cit.*, p72.

the measurement of this 'outcastness', it raises its own questions. Networks consisting of what, and of whom? Irish-only networks could have meant segregation rather than integration. But we must recall Lowe's point about Irish community institutions assisting in the process of 'bridging'. Members of a community learn at a local level about wider community membership. Networks must have served a similar purpose.

Roger Swift has argued that earlier studies of the Irish in Britain suggest that, by mid-century, the poor, Irish, Roman Catholic immigrant was truly on the edge of things, outcast by virtue of poverty, of nationalism and republicanism, of racial origin and, not least, religion<sup>94</sup>. To take these characteristics in turn: poverty was seen to be the most obvious defining feature of the Irish immigrant. For the Irish, this poverty was the creation of the British government but for the British, it was the result of Irish fecklessness, a weakness of character which gave rise to a disproportionate demand on Poor Law finances. However, the size of this so-called drain upon the public purse is a matter for debate: it varied from union to union, from time to time<sup>95</sup>. Even in beleaguered Liverpool, for example, Irish need may never have been fully recognised because of the latitude exercised in Poor Law administration. Police officers were required to investigate the home conditions of each applicant for bread and soup vouchers; in this way, imposters could be checked but also the needy who had not claimed could be identified and helped. But consider the numbers involved: from January to April 1847, at least 144,112 arrived from Ireland and by 13th April 34,855 had moved on. Given that only twenty-four police officers had to deal with such numbers, on-site visits must have been perfunctory

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94 R.E. Swift, *op. cit.* (1990), p31.

95 *ibid.*, pp.20-21.

indeed, if not largely abandoned, with the result that much Irish need must have gone unheeded. Add to this the suspicion the Irish felt towards vouchers, fearing them to be passages back to Ireland, and it can be seen that the full cost of relief may not have been incurred. At least not in inundated Liverpool, although in places less 'invaded' matters may have been ordered differently.

As for poverty being the immigrants' differentiating quality, there are difficulties in holding to this view now that it is widely agreed that Irish poor lived alongside other poor. Except for one thing: in the public perception, Irish poverty had a special quality - its violence. The Irish were disproportionately more likely to be prosecuted and convicted than the English, but this was due to the type of crime they were involved in - drunken disorder, common assault, petty theft and vagrancy. Much of the disorder and assault occurred at weekends, when what little money there was would be available, and often in defensive rather than offensive situations, for example, anti-Irish demonstrations. Petty theft can be related to endemic poverty while the rootless vagrant was seen as a potential criminal, one of the '...unholy trinity in the demonology of respectable Victorian society consisting of the vagrant, the navvy and the prostitute'<sup>96</sup>. Again, Irish communities were not equally violent and disordered, those in the north-east of England being generally well-behaved, that of St Giles in London coming at the other end of the scale. Anti-Irish prejudice may also have brought more Irish to the dock since such prejudice was firmly established before the Famine years of the 1840s and 50s. 'Little Irelands' were expected to live up to their reputations and pre-conceptions are rarely disappointed. Besides which,

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<sup>96</sup> P O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration: a study of the Irish in Wales, 1798-1922*, Ph.D. thesis, (UC Aberystwyth, 1989), p54

newly-formed police forces had to show results to justify their existence: drunken Irish were an easy target.

The second of the Irish immigrant's defining qualities was politics. Irish agrarian revolt and defiance had established certain sets of mind both in British conservatives and radicals. The significant contributions to Chartism of such as Feargus O'Connor and Bronterre O'Brien in 1848 are readily acknowledged and well-documented but nevertheless debate continues among historians over wider Irish involvement. English radicals advocated the Irish cause and gained Irish Roman Catholic support - and indeed the Irish were part of the proletarian culture - but, as Belchem points out, the newly-arrived Famine victims could not as a rule indulge in politics. The struggle for existence was enough to occupy their energies. Again, those with their sights firmly fixed on America would eschew any Chartist engagement: they would not wish to see their stay in Britain as anything but temporary<sup>97</sup>. And yet Belchem argues that the failure of Chartism contributed to the social and political isolation of the Irish in mid-century Britain<sup>98</sup>, thus implying a public identification of the Irish with Chartism, at least in its later phases. Of course, gradual and hard-won social advancement may have limited Irish involvement, especially by those who established themselves before the Famine years as good citizens and quiet Catholics<sup>99</sup>. The influx of immigrants was as embarrassing for them as it was for the public authorities struggling with sewage disposal and cholera. This was especially so later in the century: the last thing an aspiring bourgeoisie wants is a reminder of its origins.

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97 J. Belchem, *Popular Politics, 'Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History, 1790-1940* (Liverpool University Press, 1992), p78.

98 J. Belchem, 'English Working-Class Radicalism and the Irish' in Swift and Gilley (1985) op. cit., p85-97.

99 John Denvir (1894), op. cit.

Irish immigrants, by and large, were concerned to change the constitutional position of Ireland vis-à-vis Britain: an aim which could only be resented on the mainland where agitation for repeal of the Act of Union was seen as a threat to national stability. Yet this would have been difficult to achieve by constitutional means, for the Irish in their poverty were never able to register as voters in great enough numbers. Only T.P. O'Connor for the Scotland Division of Liverpool was returned to Parliament in 1885 and few, if any, constituencies were marginal enough to enable the Irish to hold the balance of power. Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the fear of outcast Irish agitation and rebellion: if success could not come via the ballot box, perhaps it could by the Fenian bomb. In the end, few Irish were actively involved in Irish politics per se, preferring to work through the Liberal Party so that by the 1880s, with Gladstone's influence, 'the Irish Parliamentary party created a mass organisation harnessed to constitutional nationalism'<sup>100</sup>. Irish political involvement in Britain was over-simplified and stereotyped in public perception by the bogies of Fenian outrages, Phoenix Park murders, Clan na Gael bombings and the like; however, the majority of Irish were loyal enough to the realm.

There remain two of Swift's criteria for Irish 'outcastness'. The Irish were Celts and as such, according to mid-Victorian pseudo-science, were a species inferior to the Anglo-Saxons. These last had, through racial mixing, acquired all the good points of the aboriginal inhabitants of these islands, together with the best qualities of the subsequent invaders. A twice-blessed Darwinian selection. Public figures like Matthew Arnold claimed that the Celts were superior poets but inept politicians; that they were at once kind but violent, witty yet stupid, hospitable but unreliable. In

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100 R.E. Swift, (1990), *op. cit.*, p.25.

1860, Charles Kingsley, later a canon of Chester Cathedral, juxtaposed a comment upon the beauty of Ireland's scenery with a description of 'human chimpanzees' along the way.<sup>101</sup> Six years later, he wrote, 'the Irish Celts seem quite unfit for self-government.' J.A. Froude (1841) spoke of 'tribes of squalid apes' and in *Punch* the Irish were frequently portrayed as gorilla-like creatures characterised by mandibular prognathism, raising fists against Britannia protecting a weeping Hibernia. On 18th June 1881, a *Punch* cartoon had Gladstone wrestling with a Land League Devil-fish whose tentacles were labelled Sedition, Anarchy, Rebellion, Lawlessness, Terrorism, Outrage, Intimidation and Obstruction - all good Celtic qualities. However, as Sheridan Gilley has contended, the Irish were equally cast as chaste, hospitable, witty, kind and generous. It took specific political or religious issues to bring forth anti-Irish feeling, issues that were rooted in the economic and social difficulties of the day. Anti-Irish attitudes were not, Gilley claims, necessarily born of racial prejudice<sup>102</sup>. The poor Irish attracted most attention and antagonism but was this by reason of their Irishness or their poverty? These questions aside, it is true that in matters of employment and tenancy that it was often the case that, 'No Irish need apply', which hardly fostered a sense of belonging.

This leaves Irish Catholicism. The majority of Irish were onerously poor, ungratefully nationalistic, racially inferior and not even Protestant. The Evangelical Revival, the anti-Tractarian backlash and the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850 all served to confirm the traditional Protestantism in England, Wales and Scotland, with reaction to disturbances such as the Murphy riots of 1867-

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101 C. Kingsley, *His Letters and Memories of his Life* (edited by his wife) (London, 1884) p236.

102 S. Gilley, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1780 - 1900', in C Holmes, (eds) *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London, 1978).

71 articulating the widespread anti-Catholic feeling. Of course, the situation was not so clear-cut as a Roman Catholic v Protestant clash: underneath were deeper problems such as fear of unemployment, manipulation of church flocks and local electorates by Anglican clergy and politicians.

Indeed, were the Irish more 'separate' because of their Catholicism than were non-Irish Catholics? Catholicism was generally suspect - it was, after all, an alien religion associated with Britain's traditional enemies like Spain and France. Again, the Irish were not uniformly under the influence of the Roman Catholic church for many of those from the remoter parts of Ireland had not had a church to attend regularly. Worship in their home was their norm and the habit of church-going - that is, under the close tutelage of the priest - was something they had to acquire in England. It may be that Irish Catholicism was not the alienating force that has been assumed in the past. Nevertheless, stereotypes have a long shelf-life and, by their very nature, lump all things together.

However, there is no doubt that, in Ireland post-1850, the decline of the Gaelic tongue and the traditional peasant society, together with the improvement of communications, prepared the way for the so-called 'devotional revolution' guided by the ultramontane Cardinal Paul Cullen (1803 - 1878). This produced a greater emphasis upon evangelism and liturgical practices, regular church-going and more conformity to the church's teaching. This increased regularity and discipline meant that post-Famine Catholic migrants to Britain were arriving with a less individual attitude to their religion and were more amenable to organised church membership than were their predecessors in the 1830s and 1840s. This would have encouraged a cohesiveness among Irish Catholics - with the corollary of 'apartness' - a condition



expressed in the building of more Catholic churches and schools, but, more convincingly perhaps, in the organisation of many social, sporting and theatrical events, plus welfare provision, vigorously pursued by the priests. Between them, the potato blight and Cardinal Cullen had transformed the Catholic church in Britain post-1850 and, arguably, increased a perception of difference both in Irish eyes and in those of their 'hosts'.

## SUMMARY

The Irish were the most considerable unintegrated group in mid-nineteenth century Britain: their class, nationality, religion and 'race' guaranteed their place as outcasts. But not all Irish desired assimilation. O'Tuathaigh says they refused and were refused it. The Irish-born cleaved to memories of old Ireland just across the Irish Sea and their third and fourth generations may have clung to symbols of the family past. Symbols are important to exiles. A parish priest could always command a good attendance for his Irish evenings and the familiar and comforting brogue heard in the local pubs and shops maintained a sense of Irish solidarity and social cohesion, both qualities reinforced by hostility from the British community. Conversely, many Irish wanted to shake off their past and enter into British society and to adopt British values and social practices.

The Irish during the nineteenth century - indeed, up to 1914 - had managed a move from a rural environment to an industrial society. Walvin contends that, by 1900, they had merged with the majority British, indistinguishable yet retaining their own religion and politics. Colin Holmes<sup>103</sup>, emphasising the difficulties involved, describes a process of Irish assimilation without loss of Irish identity. There is a certain ambivalence here. Perhaps David Fitzpatrick has it most accurately when he says that in terms of housing, church, politics and crime, the Irish immigrants and their descendants did not appear to be set apart and defensively Irish. They 'now occupied "a curious middle place" in British life'<sup>104</sup>. The phrase sounds well in the

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103 C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871 - 1971* (London, 1988), pp.20-22.

104 D. Fitzpatrick, in Swift and Gilley (1989) op. cit., p.46, quoting Felix Lavery, *Irish Heroes in War* (1917).

ears of the English for whom the truth has always resided somewhere between two extremes.

The diversity of opinion among historians of the nineteenth-century Irish immigration to Britain is largely due to two main factors: the diversity among the Irish themselves and the differences between the areas where they settled. The Irish were not a homogeneous group, but differed in social class, religion, occupations, culture and their motivations for migrating. Britain itself was in flux, its towns expanding and its countryside changing rapidly: different regions and localities offered different opportunities to the Irish migrants.

The foregoing has been concerned mainly with the experience of the Irish in English and, to a lesser extent, Scottish towns and cities. Were there no Irish in Wales? It is to this question that I now turn.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE WELSH DIMENSION OF IRISH MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT (The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Wales)

## THE WELSH DIMENSION

At first glance, the historiography of the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain seems dominated by the Irish in England. The English cities and urban Lancashire and Cheshire have received the lion's share of attention, plus Glasgow, Paisley and Dundee in Scotland, but what of Wales? Detailed studies of the Irish in Wales are available in the form of several post-graduate theses, those of O'Leary and Hickey being prominent.<sup>105</sup> In his work on the Famine Irish in South Wales, O'Leary has also stressed the importance of regional studies in extending our understanding of the Irish experience in Wales. These, he argues, can be a valuable complementary approach to micro-studies and provide a broad-brush perspective to the immigrants' experience.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, the Irish in Wales have, relatively speaking, received scant notice. This is surprising as, for most immigrants, Wales was the nearest place that wasn't Ireland. Admittedly, the Irish in Wales were fewer than their counterparts in England and this can explain the lack of attention accorded them, but if it is agreed that more local studies of the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain are needed, Wales could furnish a profitable context.

Since the mid-eighteenth century, Wales had been undergoing a rapid process of industrialisation bringing in its train a considerable movement of population and attendant difficulties. And this in a country without an industrial tradition to draw upon. Change was in the air, along with uncertainty. Gwyn A. Williams points out that the rate of population growth in Wales at this time was startling: from the mid-

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105 P.O'Leary, Ph.D thesis, (1989), op. cit; J.V.Hickey, *The Growth and Development of the Irish Community in Cardiff*, M.A. thesis, (U.C.W. Cardiff, 1959)

106 P.O'Leary, 'A Regional Perspective: the Famine Irish in South Wales' in Swift and Gilley, (eds.) *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension* (Dublin, 1999) p.14.

eighteenth century to 1921, the numbers had increased 5-fold in five or six generations, from 500,000 to 2,600,000.<sup>107</sup> This overall increase did, of course, hide regional variations, especially those in the western and northern counties which showed population losses from 1841. The developing industrial south-east (Monmouthshire and Glamorgan) became a magnet, so that before long it held over 80% of the country's protean and evermore-Anglicised people. Caernarfonshire did show an increase because of the slate industry - 90% of British production - but the north-east coalfield began to lose population from the 1860s. This latter area had grown in the earlier period of industrialisation - the Greenfield Valley, Halkyn Mountain, Wrexham - but was unable to cope with the voracious demands of South Wales steel, tinplate and coal industries.

Gwyn Williams identifies the main periods of emigration from Britain - the 'outward pulses of people' as he calls them - as 1847 to 1854, 1881 to 1888 and 1903 to 1913.<sup>108</sup> Every part of Britain responded during these times by sending its people away from these shores. All except Wales. Ireland, Williams points out, could lose 200 per 10,000 per decade; Scotland 58 to 80; England, the lowest, 20. But not Wales. Until the 1860s it would lose 28 to 47 per 10,000 per decade but in the 1880s, when England lost 23 per 10,000 and Scotland 58 per 10,000, Wales lost only 11 per 10,000. A seepage rather than an outflow. Thereafter, there was net immigration. 'The Welsh did not need to emigrate.'<sup>109</sup> They could move within their own country: to the towns, across the border to England, to the mines and works of South Wales, to the growing holiday resorts of the coastal areas. Wales was in flux.

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<sup>107</sup> G.A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Penguin, 1985), pp.173 – 181.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid*, p.177.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid*, p.180.

Did the Irish, therefore, arrive in Wales at an inopportune moment, as they did in England and Scotland, when there were problems enough? Roman Catholics in the main, did they land in the midst of a burgeoning, strident, self-aware, nonconformist ethos such as Wales had at this time, especially towards the closing decades of the century: a nation with a growing sense of identity? David Williams, touching on the social problems which follow sudden demographic increases, argues that the indigenous Welsh population was never able to absorb the 'inrush'. Between 1801 and 1841, he points out, the population of Monmouthshire increased by 11 % and that of Glamorganshire by 77%. After the Great Famine, with the Irish arriving in South Wales ports in unacceptable numbers, relations between the incomers and the Welsh grew worse. The Irish were believed to accept lower wages and thus depress the labour market; furthermore, their lack of industrial skills, coupled with the constant turn-over of the labour force, was thought to have inhibited the emergence of a working class movement.<sup>110</sup>

The 1841 census revealed 8,202 Irish-born living in Wales, or 0.8% of the total population. By comparison, Scotland had 126,321 and England 281,203, or 4.8% and 1.8% of their populations respectively.<sup>111</sup> The percentage of 0.8 for Wales does not seem statistically significant but concentration of population in particular areas in Wales was of great importance. Radnorshire, for example, in 1841 had only 33 Irish-born, or 0.12% of its population, whereas Monmouthshire (then in England) had 2,925, or 2.2% of its population. Again, not an overwhelming figure but most of these Irish-born were in Newport. Glamorgan in 1841 had 3,174 Irish-born, or 1.9%

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110 D.Williams, *A History of Modern Wales* (London, 1962), pp.229-230

111 R.E. Swift, (1990), *op. cit*, Chapter 1.

of its total population, while Cardiff had 965 who constituted 9.5% of the 10,077 population. This also meant that 30.4% of Glamorgan's Irish-born and 11.7% of the Irish-born in Wales as a whole were to be found in Cardiff. Add to this the effect of 'clustering' in particular areas and one begins to see the nature and extent of Irish 'visibility'. For instance, in May 1843 in Blaina, the Welsh turned the Irish out of their houses. Ironmaster Crawshay threatened to stop the wages of his workers participating and extra police were drafted in. And yet, in Blaina, there were only 86 Irish, or 1% of the village population, whereas the English numbered 1,985, or 24% of the population. Had the Irish been singled out for special attention?

The *Morning Chronicle*, 4th March to 26th April 1850,<sup>112</sup> noted this visibility, together with the antipathy of the native Welsh towards the Irish. These characteristics, plus the unskilled nature of the work done by the Irish labourers, together with the poverty in which they lived, made up three elements of the stereotypical response to the nineteenth-century immigrant. The newspaper's correspondent, identity unknown, remarked that 'such a wonder as an Irish puddler was never heard of'<sup>113</sup> and that

.....I have found them here filthy, sensual, crafty, quarrelsome and brutish in their habits. Their houses are unfurnished, foul and stinking; their children uncared for - barefoot, ragged, unwashed, and uneducated ..... the Welsh will not reside among them. They inhabit the lowest and worst quarters of the town. There is in Pen-y-Darran, on the high road, an Irish colony.....<sup>114</sup>

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112 J. Ginswick (ed), *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales, 1848 - 1851* (London), 1983.

113 *ibid.*, p.36.

114 *ibid.*, pp.64-65.



Such 'clustering' or, as some have had it, 'ghetto-isation', was born of much the same reasons in South Wales as it had been elsewhere: a common national, if not regional, origin; a similar economic standing at the bottom of the pile; a resentful, even hostile, attitude from the host community; and, by no means least, cheap lodgings. As elsewhere too, the Great Famine gave the Irish their high South Walian profile. Arriving in such ships as the *Wanderer* of Baltimore, Co. Cork, which left Ireland on 23 December 1846 and, after a forty-day voyage, docked in Newport on 1 February 1847, destitute people disembarked in such numbers that the Poor Law authorities had difficulty coping. *The Wanderer*, for example, brought 113 refugees - 26 of them dying - to Newport and, during the first few weeks of 1847, the town's Refuge for the Destitute fed and accommodated 1,131 men, women and children. In the spring of 1847, the influx grew and, by May, attitudes towards the destitute Irish became hardened, with many being ordered out of the town. By March 1849, fines and imprisonment were being imposed upon ships' masters who deposited their wretched human cargoes into the care of the embattled local authorities.<sup>115</sup> The Irish became synonymous with disease so that in April 1847, after the incidence of 'famine fever' during the winter months, the Marquess of Bute was moved to suggest that Cardiff establish a quarantine station on Flatholm in the Bristol Channel along the lines of Grosse Island, Quebec, Deer Island off Boston and Staten Island in the Hudson River. Ill-nourished and crammed in small holds with livestock and damp ballast, it is little wonder that the immigrants were susceptible to disease; at the same time, it is understandable that, given the appearance of disease, the Irish should be blamed not only for its spread but for its introduction.

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115 P.O'Leary, (1999), op. cit. pp.18-19 and p.21.

Their wretchedness, their obvious poverty, their association with disease, their cheap labour, their religion, their apparent exclusivity in Irish districts - all these characteristics were compounded in a potent stereotype which hardly augured well for the Irish immigrants' new beginning. Moreover, unwelcoming looks came not solely from the Welsh. Following their pre-Famine predecessors, the Irish would be attracted to towns and villages with an existing Irish presence; where they were not always welcome. There were some Irish who were dedicated to sobriety, thrift and progress and, as elsewhere, the Irish who were establishing themselves in their local communities were hardly pleased to see their poverty-stricken and less than orderly compatriots engaged in 'ethnic' conflict with their new neighbours. This point about respectability is one that Paul O'Leary presents - along with vagrancy and criminality-as crucial in the contact of the Irish with authority in Victorian Wales<sup>116</sup>

The Friendly Societies were expressions of such respectability and the Irish were not without them. Paradoxically for associations dedicated to sobriety and thrift, they often met in public houses. In 1830, well before the Famine years, the Hibernian Liberal Benefit Society met in the 'Ship' in Newport and the Hibernian Independent Benefit Society in the 'Daniel O'Connell'. There were Irish societies in Abersychan, Pontypool and Cardiff and - to look ahead to Irish experience in North Wales - the Catholic Friendly Society in Holywell was established on 6th August 1840. But it was vagrancy and criminality which dominated the picture of the Irish in nineteenth century South Wales.

Over the years 1819 to 1822, the Irish vagrant had used up an average of 48.8% of Carmarthenshire's expenditure on the apprehension and conveyance

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116 P. O'Leary, Ph.D. thesis, (1989), op. cit. p.43.

of vagrants; 39.9% of Pembrokeshire's. That is, £174.11s.9d out of £386.9s.3d and, for Pembrokeshire, £57.2s.6d out of £135.0s.7d. These are substantial figures - which pale somewhat in the face of Caernarfonshire's 71% for 1822 - reflecting the serious threat to community order which the vagrant was seen to embody. The rootless vagrant was potentially criminal, with nothing to lose. The male Irish vagrant seemed even more of a threat for he demanded shelter, food and clothing and left his wife and children at the port of entry to be cared for by the local authorities and to beg, a practice they had been well acquainted with for in Ireland itself begging was usually undertaken by women and children. W.D. Boase a poor Law inspector, reported in 1848 that by far the greatest proportion of Irish vagrants in Wales were women with small children, old men apparently feeble, pregnant women, and girls about ten years old'<sup>117</sup> By comparison, Boase claimed, the Irish who arrived in Liverpool were vigorous young men who had marched from the west of Ireland to the Irish Sea ports. It was feared that a dependency culture would develop among the South Wales Irish migrants - a 'dangerous class' in society'<sup>118</sup> - which would have its own internal hierarchy of 'casuals' and 'permanents'. For instance, in 1848, Newport Union spent an average of 3 ½d. per head relieving its Irish paupers, whereas Cardiff spent 8s · 5d. per head. It is a fair assumption that Newport's Irish pauper was a transient - a 'casual'- while Cardiff's was more a 'career' pauper'<sup>119</sup>

If the character of the Irish migrant in Wales included sober industry at one end of the scale and feckless pauperism at the other, so did crime range over time

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<sup>117</sup> P.O'Leary, in Swift and Gilley, (1999), p.25.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

from simple theft of basic materials to gratuitous violence and fraud. An analysis of the Quarter Sessions records for Glamorgan from 1845 to 1855 shows that the Irish, male and female, featured largely in thefts of basics like food and clothing, coal and timber; by 1865 to 1875 they were to be among the statistics for violence, assault and counterfeiting of pence and ha'pence (the 'smashers'). Their needs had obviously changed.<sup>120</sup> Similar progression was to be discerned in Denbighshire where the county's Quarter Sessions records showed that, between 1851 and 1856, indictable crime by the Irish involved theft of bread and clothing, but that, by 1876, such offences had largely disappeared.<sup>121</sup> Henry Richard, (1812 - 88) Member of Parliament for Merthyr Tydfil from 1868 until his death, argued that, in 1864, the 'Judicial Statistics' disclosed that the persons committed in England numbered 122,589, or 1 to every 155 of the population. However, in Wales, Richard contended, of the 4,417 committed, 1,006 were English-born, 846 Irish-born, 78 Scottish-born, 135 foreign-born and 29 of unknown origin. That is, of the 1864 totals, only 2,323 were Welsh and, as he said, 'of those criminals who disgrace the Principality nearly one-half are not natives.'<sup>122</sup> He went on to quote from the editor of a Welsh periodical who said that, 'but for the foreign tramps that infested the country, the gaols in some of our counties in Wales might really be almost shut up.'<sup>123</sup> After an 1865 Midsummer Assizes, a High Sheriff addressing the judge had 'great pleasure, in accordance with the ancient custom, in presenting you with a pair of white gloves'. There was, it seems, so little of consequence to adjudicate upon, that, according to custom, the judge received a pair of white gloves. Wales was known as

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120 P.O'Leary, Ph.D thesis (1989), p.67. (But see Note 288, Chapter 7)

121 County Record Office, Ruthin, QSD/55/1, QSD/SE/1.

122 Henry Richard. *Letters and Essays on Wales* (London, 1884). p.57.

123 *ibid.*, p.58.

The Land of the White Gloves: a land of purity and probity. An echo of this occurred in the *Wrexham and Denbighshire Weekly Advertiser* for 7th January 1860 wherein it was reported that a Denbighshire Quarter Sessions chairman informed the Grand Jury that,

"there is very little business to detain you here today ..... the state of crime is generally on the decrease throughout the county..... the county was never in a more peaceable and contented state than it is at present ..... the police are on the alert, and probably prevent a good deal of crime.'

It is always convenient to blame crime upon strangers and, without doubt, the symbol of the white gloves served to avoid contact with unpalatable truth. Consider prostitution: of the forty known practitioners in Merthyr Tydfil in 1859, six were English and six Irish but the majority, twenty-three, were Welsh. Again, in 1889, of the 480 shebeens in Cardiff by no means all were run by Irish navvies working on Barry Docks and undoubtedly local Welsh " bona fide Sunday travellers" were their main customers buying " a cross between senna and vinegar" at 6d a quart.<sup>124</sup> See, again, that a Castell Deudraeth magistrate could equate absence of crime in the quarrying areas of Merioneth and Caernarfonshire with an absence of Irish and indeed John Denvir in 1892 could remark that an Irishman needed to commit a crime before his nationality was mentioned. Was this a sign of assimilation or merely scant numbers?

One area where assimilation did not take place was religion. The nineteenth century saw a rapid expansion in Roman Catholic membership from localities where families like the Mostyns had influence, to a more regional constituency. The

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<sup>124</sup> W.R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales, 1820-1895* (U.W. Press, 1983), p.226.

Society of Jesus, distinctly local in influence in North Flintshire, was based in Bristol and the Franciscan Order in Monmouth and Hereford sent itinerant priests to South Wales but the Catholic church was, in general, caught unawares by the Famine influx. Indeed, so ignorant of the Irish in South Wales was the Catholic organisation that, until there was an anti-Irish riot, in Gelligaer in 1826, no priest had visited there: the following Christmas a priest was dispatched to celebrate Mass. After the appointment in 1840 of Bishop T.J. Brown as Vicar Apostolic in the new Welsh district, the Roman Catholic organisation began to develop. The problems of accommodating services were met by using private houses, shops, etc. and, later, under Brown's successor, Bishop Hedley, a programme of church building was embarked upon. St David's Church in Cardiff records a rise in membership of almost 9,000 between 1846 and 1861.<sup>125</sup> Professor I.G. Jones has devised an Index of Religious Attendance, which though yielding only approximate results, gives an adequate indication of church membership. This is based on the total number of those at all services on Census Sunday in 1851 as a proportion of the total population of the district: thus the total of all at Roman Catholic services as a proportion of the Irish-born population would give a crude index of Irish Roman Catholic membership. Newport appears as a leading Catholic centre with an Irish index of attendance of 80.4 as against a Town Index of 64.4; Wrexham, with smaller numbers, yields an index of 50.6 against 74.4.<sup>126</sup>

The growing presence of the Catholic church in South Wales perhaps served as a catalyst for local and regional tensions born of the surge in population, economic and employment uncertainties, fear of disease and civil unrest. The arrival of the

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125 J.V. Hickey, *op. cit.* (1959), p.85, Table V1.

126 I.G. Jones, quoted in P.O' Leary, *op.cit.*, 1989.

Irish in such large numbers had prompted hostility among the native population and, since Catholicism seemed synonymous with Irishness, the church became a focus for mob violence. In Cardiff, in November 1848, following the murder of a Welshman by an Irishman, St David's Roman Catholic Chapel was attacked and its priest, Father Millea, forced to flee; Irish houses nearby were similarly treated. In response, three hundred Irish navvies working on the South Wales railway marched into the town to defend the chapel. Shock waves occurred and violent incidents were reported in Dowlais and Newport. In North Wales at this time, general anxiety and civil unrest had no such focus for their expression. The Catholic church here was yet to develop its organisation so that the tensions between the Irish and the indigenous population had their flashpoints at work and at a personal level. As in South Wales, railway building provided a flashpoint and on 22 May 1846, sixty to seventy Irish navvies were driven along the line from Penmaenmawr to Bangor. Further conflict flared in 1851 when Irish navvies working on the Holyhead breakwater killed a Welshman in a brawl, an account of which was reported in the Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald on 17 May 1851. These incidents must be seen against a background of employment uncertainty and the unsettling arrival of a force of men hacking its way along a sleepy coastline unused to such upheaval.

The paramount question which arises from this concerns the role of Roman Catholic Church working with the Irish in a predominantly Protestant context, not to say a Welsh-language, nonconformist setting. The Welsh population was exploding, its centres of concentration were shifting, its composition was changing and into this melting-pot arrived large numbers of Irish. The Roman Catholic Church followed them and, as the century wore on, evolved from a sect to a denomination with organisation, a hierarchy and a discrete function. Its influence deepened. The Irish

immigrants in South Wales may eventually have lost much, if not all, their Irish-ness but, in most cases, their religion remained. They may have rid themselves of their poverty, their accents, their political leanings but their sense of difference survived, perhaps by virtue of their religion. Integration into South Wales society did not therefore mean total assimilation. In short, South Wales showed a similar picture to that found in the urban areas of England where, in all their heterogeneity, the Irish were to be found defying their stereotype.

The experience of the Irish in nineteenth-century North Wales was of a much smaller scale. There were fewer of them than there were in the south of the country and, as one result, they have received much less attention. Just as the historiography of the larger 'shock' cities of nineteenth-century England and Scotland has cast a deep shadow over the studies of the Irish in Wales, so perhaps have the South Wales Irish overshadowed their compatriots in nineteenth-century North Wales. However, whilst it is true that the Irish in North Wales constituted a small element in the total population, work over the last decade - and certainly since Herson's 1986 study of Stafford - has shown the value of micro-studies in redressing the dominance of overviews based on large urban centres. For one thing, the comparative smallness of the numbers of Irish-born and their children - British-born but 'Irish-reared' - may even provide a special perspective to the portrait, an intimate miniature rather than the epic sweep.

My concern for the remainder of this Chapter will be North Wales as a context for Irish migration, with a specific focus upon the towns of Wrexham, Mold, Flint and Holywell. These towns were not so dynamic in their development as those in South Wales; they were not such crucibles of growth.



The following figures show the difference in size and growth between the North and South Wales towns:

*Table 7: A Comparison of the Population of Towns and Boroughs in North and South Wales, 1851 – 1881.*

TOWN	1851	1861	1871	1881	Increase 1851 – 1881
Wrexham	6,714	7,562	8,576	10,978	4,264*
Holyhead	5,622	6,193	7,191	8,680	3,058
Flint	3,296	3,428	4,269	5,096	1,800
Cardiff	18,351	32,954	57,363 <sup>†</sup>	82,761	64,410
Swansea	31,461	41,606	51,702	65,597	34,136
Newport	19,323	23,249	27,069	38,469	19,146

\* including Townships of Wrexham Regis and Wrexham Abbot and part of Esclusham-Below.

<sup>†</sup> new boundaries

(Sources: John Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, Vol.1 [Government Statistical Service], 1985; Irish University Press, *Population*, Vols. 7 to 17.)

The difference is obvious: the South was far and away the 'boom' area, with the slate town of Ffestiniog in Merionethshire the only North Wales place to show a comparable surge in population, a growth of 7,814 from 3,460 in 1851 to 11,274 in 1881.

In terms of industrial development, much of North Wales was comparatively inactive. The Chester- Holyhead railway was completed in 1848 and had provided work for Irish labourers and, as we have seen, a stage for animosity between themselves and their Welsh counterparts. However, the towns along the coast had yet to develop their tourist industry to the full, an activity which absorbed few Irish in any case. The slate industry of Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire was very

much a local, even family, monopoly and employed very few Irish. For instance, in Bethesda in 1871, 95% of the population were born locally and only 0.2% in Ireland.<sup>127</sup> An exception to this industrial quietness was the north-east of the area. The economy of Wrexham, based on milling, brewing, meat processing, iron, steel and coal products, maintained a steady growth, while, during the 1860s, the economy of Flint and Deeside was stimulated by the re-opening of chemical works. Market towns such as Denbigh, Ruthin and Mold held their own as local centres. Given the attraction of available work, Irish were established in the smaller towns, while more rapid economic growth encouraged a greater in-and out-migration in the more industrially-dynamic centres of population. Numbers were never high but significant within the totals of individual towns - 4% to 6% - and comparable with the percentages of much larger places such as Swansea (4.3%) and Birmingham (4%).<sup>128</sup>

Changes were occurring in economic activity and shifts were taking place in the hierarchy of the area's towns. Wrexham, for instance, began to cast off its dependence on agriculture and to develop its industrial and business aspects. Deeside, on the other hand, gradually relinquished its economic leadership of the area to Wrexham. This was due both to internal weakness in Flintshire's economy and to factors external to Wrexham. Flintshire's economic importance lay mainly in its geology, especially in the carboniferous rocks, but the associated industry was of too small a scale to cope with the nineteenth-century's industrial surge and with increasing competition from overseas. For Wrexham, however, the improvement of road and rail connections between 1840 and 1880 enabled the town to become the

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127 Geraint Davies, 'Bethesda - the Growth and Development of a Slate Quarrying Town, 1820 to 1890', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (U. Wales, Aberystwyth, 1984).

128 F. Neal, *Sectarian Violence* (Manchester Univ. Press, 1988), p.10.

commercial, administrative and industrial hub of the northern borderland between England and Wales. A comparison of population changes in the towns of Wrexham and Flint from 1851 to 1881 shows that the former had a 12.6% increase in each of the earlier decades and a 28.9% increase between 1871 and 1881; Flint increased by only 4% from 1851 to 1861, then surged forward in the following decade with a 24.5% growth, to fall back to 19.3% by 1881. Of the two counties, Denbighshire had the steadier growth rate, with an average decennial increase, from 1851 to 1871, of 6.5%, whereas Flintshire's was 5.6%; over the period 1851 to 1891, however, Flintshire's rate was only 4.4%, the result of a population loss between 1881 and 1891.

*Table 8: Percentage population changes, Wrexham and Flint, 1851 to 1881, and Denbighshire and Flintshire, 1851 to 1891*

	1851 - 1861	1861 - 1871	1871 - 1881	1881 - 1891
Wrexham	+12.6%	+12.6%	+28.9%	-
Flint	+4%	+24.5%	+19.3%	-
Denbighshire	+8.9%	+4.1%	+6.5%	+5.3%
Flintshire	+2.3%	+9.1%	+5.6%	-3.9%

*Source:* J. Williams, *Digest*, Vol.1 (1985)<sup>129</sup>

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129 Source: J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, Vol 1 (1985).

## WREXHAM

Wrexham, then, was the chief attraction - for migrants of all kinds - with its increasing diversity of employment. It was a maturing town, a description with which George T. Davies, a superintending inspector making a report to the General Board of Health in 1850, might well have agreed:

.... the main streets are broad, and the houses composing them well built. A public infirmary, a savings' bank, a chapel, a new market, and several handsome shops give a character to the place, and show that it is on the whole in a thriving condition.<sup>130</sup>

However, Davies knew enough to look behind the fine facades for he further remarked that 'the good appearance of Wrexham is confined to its main streets and to the fronts of the houses composing them.'

The town is situated on a well-drained glacial delta terrace of sand and gravel to the east of the Ruabon and Esclusham uplands.<sup>131</sup> It came to control the north-south routes along the borderland, the east -west communications into Wales via the Vale of Llangollen and the fault - line depressions into the Vale of Clwyd. Its local coalfield began to be developed in the eighteenth century and was able to service the area's iron industry established at Brymbo by John Wilkinson in 1795. During the following century, mining moved eastwards to exploit the deeper Middle Coal measures, a change which decreased the numbers of workings but increased the scale of their operations. Allied to the coalmining was exploitation of fireclay in the

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130 P.P. Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into the Sewage, Drainage, and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Conditions of the Inhabitants of the Town, Borough, or Place of Wrexham, Public Health Act, pp. 4-5, para. 9.

131 R.M. Millward and A. Robinson, *The Welsh Borders* (London, 1978), p.46.

Ruabon area to create a thriving brick and terracotta industry. The local coal possessed volatile matter, for example, in its cannel coal used for oil extraction, and the growing demand for coal gas in the later nineteenth century helped to underpin the diversification of industry in the locality.

George T. Davies also noted the borderland nature of Wrexham's position and the two-fold source of the town's prosperity:

Wrexham is placed upon the North Wales border, upon a tract of hilly and broken ground, which intervenes between the lofty mountains of Flint and the flat and fertile meads of the Cheshire Dee. The coalfield, extending from Oswestry northwards to the estuary, is here supported on the west by limestones of Mold and Halkin, and on the east is covered up by the new red sandstone. Wrexham stands nearly upon the junction of the two formations, here covered up by a tract of gravel; and derives its mineral wealth from the one and its agricultural supplies chiefly from the fertile soil of the other.<sup>132</sup>

In Wrexham itself and its immediate environs, the Rivers Gwenfro and Clywedog had from Tudor times provided water and power for woollen mills and maltings. The town's numerous small smithies and workshops owed their existence to the ores of Minera to the west and, indeed, it has been suggested that the name of the town derives from the Old English "wyrhta ", or worker, maker; that is, the place of wrights.<sup>133</sup> These craftsmen, including lorimers, locksmiths and wire drawers, had flourished until improved transport allowed the bulk import of their products from large factories elsewhere. Printing, papermaking and publishing had been established in Wrexham in the eighteenth century and continued to grow throughout

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<sup>132</sup> Report to the General Board of Health, 1850, p.4, paras. 5 and 6.

<sup>133</sup> R.R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyndwr*, (O.U.P. 1997), p. 28.

the nineteenth. By 1830 there were three paper mills on the River Clywedog and by the town's incorporation in 1857 there were five printers in the town.

Spinners and weavers, hatters, tanners and curriers, clothiers, shoemakers and saddlers, nailers, brewers, printers - all manner of craftsmen plied their trades through the year in Wrexham's streets and lanes. Then for two weeks in March, these artisans exhibited their wares at the annual fair, to be joined by Yorkshire clothiers, Lancashire cotton sellers and Midlands hardware makers. The town's street names reflect the wider importance of this great fair - Yorkshire Square, Birmingham Square, Manchester Hall - and, while communications with the country at large remained rudimentary, the annual event flourished. With road improvements and the arrival of the Chester - Shrewsbury railway, the fair declined and the Squares were roofed over to become market halls. Trade was beginning to lose its seasonal rhythm to be replaced by permanent shops in town. By 1828, Wrexham had almost a hundred such shops and retailers arrived in the town from its hinterland and some from as far a field as London.<sup>134</sup> Many of the town's mayors in the early years of its incorporation were these 'immigrants'. A central business district developed, and concomitant with this process, a growth of residential suburbs. A further indication of Wrexham's increasing commercial development was the growth of banks and friendly societies. Richard Lloyd began banking from his house in Chester Street and was soon rivalled in 1800 by James Kendrick. A financial crash in 1849 ruined both men and the town's twelve friendly societies, but branches of national banking institutions appeared in mid-century to replace the failed local ventures. Large

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<sup>134</sup> A.H. Dodd, (ed), *A History of Wrexham*, (Wrexham, 1957, re-printed 1989), p. 230.

insurance concerns also arrived in Wrexham and one, the Provincial Welsh Insurance Company, had its origin and headquarters in a splendid building in the High Street.

The social life of the town - which may have held a passing interest for Irish migrants - included horse - racing and pugilism. Bull- baiting was outlawed in 1835 and cockfighting in 1849 and, indeed, Wrexham's racing was to become the scene of such violence and destructive behaviour that it was discontinued from 1862 to 1890. However, pugilism and football remained popular: memorable prizefights were held between 1871 and 1887 and Wrexham Football Club was founded in 1870. More 'cultural' tastes were catered for at Mr Thomas Penson's Beast Market Theatre, whose offerings included at least one performance of 'Macbeth'; however, in 1875 it became a temperance hall.<sup>135</sup> More seriously, the town had its newspapers - the *Register* (1848), and the weekly *Advertiser* (1849) - and its publishing houses. Among the latter, Hughes and Son, which produced books in English and Welsh, was the most prominent. The *Advertiser* continued until 1933 and is a source of much information concerning the life and times of nineteenth-century Wrexham. The *Wrexham and North Wales Guardian* began in 1867 and offered a conservative antidote to the Liberal and Nonconformist bias of the *Advertiser*. However despite its theatricals and its press, Wrexham was not renowned as a centre of cultural activity. As the *Wrexham Register* in 1849 stated:

Wrexham is not a place of literature, in the proper sense of the term, the tastes, refinement, and elegance of literary life being very little known..... We are a population of shopkeepers and tradespeople, grocers, drapers, millers, and miners, with a most unreasonable number of innkeepers and publicans.

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135 *ibid.*, p. 247.

This description would have fitted many another developing town in mid - nineteenth century Britain and not one which would have deterred the average migrant, Irish or otherwise.

All in all, Wrexham at this time would appear to have presented a fairly confident face to the immigrant. It had a mixed economy and was not dominated by one large industry. It was being progressively connected to the national road and rail network, its coalfield and associated brick and earthenware industries thriving along with the expansion of its urban areas. Its financial services and commercial expertise were developing. Work would have seemed available. Public health and housing, however, were yet to be improved and would have to wait for the operational powers following upon incorporation in 1857 and private and civic endeavour later in the century. But there was a hospital - the Wrexham Dispensary established in 1838 - and, by 1847, nine schools in the town. A Medical Officer of Health was appointed in 1872 and Public Health Inspectors in 1875.

Such was the town to which the flow of Irish increased in the mid - nineteenth century to constitute approximately five percent of the population. Many moved on; some stayed; a few prospered. This study aims to include demographic aspects of the sojourn of those Irish who passed through Wrexham in the second half of the nineteenth century and to evaluate the social economic experience of those Irish who stayed. And, as previously stated, it is intended to consider, likewise, the experience and disposition of the Irish in other parts of North-East Wales, in particular in the Flintshire towns of Mold, Holywell and Flint. A simple overview of the population from 1851 to 1881 has Denbighshire in the ascendant and Flintshire in decline, but it must be recognised that because Denbighshire began from a higher



base than did Flintshire, the percentage rises of the counties were not so disparate: 20.1% and 18.2%. To see the truth of the rise and fall of the two counties one needs to extend the period under review to 1891: Denbighshire 27%, Flintshire 13%. So what had Flintshire to offer the migrant in mid-century? The county's decline was not so acute that it presented only a grim landscape to the potential incomer; a sunlit vista did open up occasionally, as in Flint in the 1860s. And the Irish did come.

## FLINTSHIRE

Geology had been of paramount importance to Flintshire during the eighteenth century. Limestone quarrying, lead, zinc, calcite and haematite extraction - all these, plus coal mining, gave rise to a lively economy and a steady increase in population. Halkyn Mountain, in the heart of the area, was riddled with mineshafts and the Greenfield Valley, running north-east from Holywell to the Dee estuary, resounded with the hum and clangour of mills and factories processing silk and cotton, iron and brass. Bagillt, Flint and Mostyn on the coast had calcinaries, lead mills, rope works and coalmines. Pottery, bricks and coal were produced in quantity, while villages like Bodfari and Afonwen had their smaller ironworks. Streams flowing out of the area's limestone core supplied waterpower sufficient for the local needs.

Here, of course, lay one of the area's drawbacks: it lacked scale. Its streams were too small, its coal seams too geologically fraught. The River Dee with its apparent potential as primary transport proved too shallow for large cargo vessels. These physical limitations, plus low and variable market prices, reduced the area's viability as an economic leader. By 1851, other areas had taken the lead and the population growth rate fell behind that of England and Wales as a whole. Between 1851 and 1881, the population of Flintshire rose by 12,431 from 68,156 to 80,587, or 18%. However, by 1891, this had fallen to 77,277, a decrease of 3,310, or 4%. This means that in 1851 Flintshire had 5.8% of the population of Wales, but that, by 1891, this had fallen to 4.4%. The comparative figures for the period 1851 to 1891 are as follows:

Table 9: The Populations of Wales and Flintshire, 1851 - 1891

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
Co. of Flintshire	68,156	69,737	76,312	80,587	77,277
Wales	1,163,139	1,280,413	1,412,583	1,571,780	1,77,451
Flints population as % of Total population of Wales	5.8%	5.4%	5.4%	5%	4.4%

Source: J. Williams, *Digest of Wales Historical Statistics*<sup>136</sup>

The most discernible growth occurred along the north coast in such resorts as Rhyl and Prestatyn, the former growing from 289 in 1801 to 4,500 in 1871 and 8,473 by 1901.

The extractive industries were plagued by mining difficulties, the small size of their operations and increasing competition from overseas. Cannel coal - a bituminous coal used in the production of oils and gas - was found in the Mold area and an associated oil processing plant was established in nearby Leeswood. It was short-lived for American oil production was too keen a competitor. Lead mining ran into flooding and ventilation problems, while labour disagreements exacerbated the industry's difficulties. Brick and pottery production seemed to have reached a plateau by the late 1850s, while copper and brass smelting had virtually disappeared from Holywell, employing a mere forty workers. However, cotton and woollen mills prospered. There were 55 workers at the woollen mill at Holywell in 1851 and in 1858 another mill was established in the nearby Greenfield Valley; four miles away, Caerwys had two mills.

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136 J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics* (Government Statistical Service, 1985) op. cit.

Cotton had its place in Mold's industrial history, dating from 1792 when the Knight brothers from Manchester established a mill on the Denbigh road. There were almost 300 employees in 1838 when ownership changed hands and weaving was introduced. The mill survived economic stumps in the early 1830s, the 1850s and the shortage of raw cotton caused by the blockade of Southern States ports during the American Civil War.

During the decade 1851 to 1861, Flintshire's population grew by 2.3% compared to Glamorgan's 37% and that of England and Wales by 11.9%. Within such overall figures were local gains and losses. Rhuddlan, which included Rhyl, increased by 44.2% and Treuddyn by 35.8% but Halkyn decreased by 22.3% and Newmarket by 19%. Holywell lost over a thousand people mainly in the later 1850s. Mold parish increased by 9.9% largely in the cannel coal villages of Leeswood, Padeswood and Buckley. From 1861 to 1871, economic activity was buoyant enough to encourage the building of local railway extensions and even the creation of a harbour at Point of Ayr. The area's cannel coal remained in demand, with 150,000 tons per annum being mined by 1865. Comparison of pithead prices shows the value of cannel coal to Flintshire: ordinary coal was 6s a ton, cannel coal 28s a ton. However, to add to the geological difficulties that were being experienced, an economic slump occurred 1869 - 70. Lead, too, declined from 5,000 tons produced in 1860 to 4,000 in 1871 with the number of miners falling to 772. The county had four iron ore mines at Bodfari, Cwm, Henfryn and Dyserth producing some 1,500 tons of haematite by 1870: foundries and blast furnaces were moved to the coast at Sandycroft and Mostyn Quarry. Paper milling and copper processing continued at Greenfield and the Mold cotton mill employed 250 workers when it was destroyed by fire and, because it had been underinsured, never re-built. To add to the decline of

the textile industry, the Holywell Woollen mill closed at this time. Lead, coal and chemicals would henceforth be the largest source of income for Flintshire.

The following decade saw the most vigorous activity in the country's coal industry. By 1875 annual production was up to 985,000 tons from 60 mines, with 5,000 miners in employment. However, increasing problems of production - geological faults and exhausted seams - boded ill for coal mining in the area, especially as American oil production was to undercut the local distillation of oil from cannel coal. A demand for zinc continued so that by 1881, the mining of 4,000 tons of lead and 4,000 tons of zinc employed over a thousand miners. Iron production was, however, more desultory and all works were on the coast. On the other hand, the chemical industry was expanding, by 1860 employing 600. The Muspratt Works at Flint was the most important centre, together with the alkali works, processing copper from copper pyrites. Paper was produced at three mills at Flint employing 108 workers, and two woollen mills at Holywell gave employment to 170 people.

Mold was no longer a population growth area but Rhuddlan increased by 34%, Northop by 24.5% and Flint by 18.4%. In smaller centres of population there was a decrease, e.g. Llanasa -8.5%, Newmarket -16.2%. In the county as a whole there was an increase of 6.8% but over the same period Glamorgan increased by 28.5% and England and Wales by 14.4%.

If the 1870s had seen some economic energy, the following decade was one of depression. The River Dee Company proved unsuccessful and the river's navigation problems grew. By 1884, only four or five ships of 150 tons each were plying any kind of trade on the Flintshire coast. Lead and coal mining declined and

iron slumped to less than a hundred tons per year. Muspratts Chemical Works at Connah's Quay closed in 1884 and in Buckley brick production was static.

The period from 1851 to 1891 witnessed an overall decline in Flintshire's rate of population growth. In 1811, the county's population was 45,939 and, in 1841, 66,919, a rise of 20,982 over thirty years. The following four censuses, 1851 to 1881, saw a rise of only 12,431. (By 1891, there had been an inter-censal decrease of 3,159, or -3.9%). However, the increase was not steady over the period, that is, 1841 to 1851 seeing a rise of 1.8%; 1851 to 1861, a rise of 2.3%, followed, in the next ten years, by a climb of 9.4%.<sup>137</sup> There were of course local variations, Rhuddlan, with its burgeoning youngster, Rhyl, saw the largest increase: 154%, or 4,700 persons. Hawarden over the same period increased by 56.9%, or 3,530 persons, largely through the growth of nearby industrial Saltney. Industrial development, too, accounted for Flint's 73.2% increase. However, Mold increased by only 18.6% and Holywell declined by 16.2%. In short, the places dependent upon mining and agriculture had been severely affected with their populations moving to England, neighbouring Welsh counties and abroad. In the 1891 census, 90,714 people gave their birthplace as Flintshire but 35,874 of these lived elsewhere in England and Wales, i.e., almost 40%. On the other hand, 22,437 living in Flintshire had been born somewhere else: 9,477 in other parts of Wales (2,845 in Denbighshire, the neighbouring Welsh county) and 7,113 in Cheshire and Lancashire.

These changes reflected shifts in the importance and economies of towns. From information concerning services and facilities as given in Slater's Commercial

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<sup>137</sup> Source: County Record Office, Hawarden, 1951 Census Report.

Directories of North Wales, 1858 and 1895, a hierarchy of Flintshire's towns has been posited:

1858	1895
Holywell, Mold	Rhyl
Rhyl	Mold
Flint, Hawarden	Flint, Buckley, St Asaph

138

Such league tables may provide an insight into the mobility of nineteenth-century local populations and provide a context for the movement of the Irish. As a town's economy changed, so did its population, even though migration was only over a short distance.

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138 K. Davies, 'The Growth and Development of Settlement and Population in Flintshire, 1851 - 1891', in *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, 1973 - 4, Vol.26 pp144 - 169. (Other sources for this section on Flintshire's economic development: G.A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Penguin 1985), Chapter 7; H. Carter, 'The Growth of Industry, 1750 - 1850' and J.A. Taylor, 'The Northern Borderland' in E.G. Bowen, (ed), *Wales, A Physical, Historical and Regional Geography*, (London, 1957).

## SUMMARY

Wales provided both regional and local contexts for the study of the Irish in the nineteenth-century Britain. The Irish contributed to the great increase in the population of Welsh towns, but as, elsewhere in Britain, they were frequently more 'visible' than others by virtue of their poverty, their religion and their clustering in wretched housing. They were often met with hostility, especially in South Wales, and labelled as vagrants and criminals, however unjustly.

The industrial development of North Wales was much smaller than that of the South, with shifts occurring in the economic leadership of the area. Apart from Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire, with their monopoly of slate-quarrying, North - East Wales had the largest concentration of industry. Here, over the period, leadership shifted from Flintshire to the Wrexham area, although, within Flintshire, the town of Flint itself and, later, the coastal resort of Rhyl were to provide the greatest attraction for the Irish, as the following Chapter will demonstrate.

The wider national context for the Irish migrant having been considered, with a sharper focus on the Irish in Wales, specific questions now pose themselves. These are concerned with such matters as: Irish population, Social Structure and Settlement patterns in North-East Wales. It is to these issues that I now turn.



## CHAPTER THREE

### IRISH POPULATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

To provide a perspective and a context for any study of the Irish in North-East Wales, it is necessary, first, to look at the population figures and changes in Wales as a whole in more detail than hitherto. Comparisons between North and South Wales and between counties need to be drawn. It is obvious that South Wales had twice the population and the higher growth rate: the North grew by 68,734 from 1851 to 1881, the South by 339,907. However, not all Welsh settlements increased; indeed, of the thirteen Welsh counties (including Monmouthshire), six fell in numbers, the more rural leading the decline. Glamorgan's growth was highest, from 279,584 in 1851 to 511,433 in 1881. Monmouthshire came second moving by 53,849 to 211,267. Third, another South Wales county - Carmarthenshire - grew from 14,232 to 124,864.

By 1881, the concentrations of population in Wales were as follows:

Glamorganshire 32.5%	Denbighshire 7.1%	Montgomeryshire 4.1%
Monmouthshire 13.5%	Pembrokeshire 6%	Breconshire 3.6%
Carmarthenshire 8%	Flintshire 5.1%	Merionethshire 3.3%
Caemarfonshire 7.6%	Cardiganshire 4.4%	Anglesey 3.2%
		Radnorshire 1.5%

These figures demonstrate the growing concentration of population in the coastal hinterlands with their industrial and trading interests. Rural de-population and increasing urbanisation were the key demographic factors in the nineteenth century, in Wales as in Britain at large.

How far did the Irish feature in these figures? Hickey has given some indication of their constituency in Cardiff: by 1861, the town's population included

18% Irish-born and other Irish.<sup>139</sup> If this seems too high a proportion, it should be noted that Hickey quotes the parish register of St David's Catholic church for 1961 as consisting of 9,800 and that of St Peter's , Roath, a further thousand.<sup>140</sup> It is not an unreasonable assumption that many of these churchgoers were of Irish origin.

Hickey gives the following Catholic Church membership on Cardiff's growing suburbs as the century wore on:

St Peter's, Roath, in 1861, 1,000, in 1877, 1,800, in 1886, 3,500.

In Canton, in 1865, 1,000 and, in 1877, 1,100.

In Grangetown, in 1877, 500.<sup>141</sup>

Furthermore, Hickey notes that, in 1881, the 'place of birth' of Cardiff's population as given in the census returns was: Wales 50,110 (60.5%), England 26,982 (32.6%) and Ireland 4,259 (5.2%). The Irish contingent between 1851 and 1900 originated chiefly from Munster (44%); secondly, from Leinster (22%); then came Connacht (20%)and, finally, Ulster (10%).<sup>142</sup> This was the pattern which fits received opinion on migration routes based on the shortest distance between two points, that is, Cork to the South Wales ports.

Frank Neal, concentrating upon the years of the Great Famine, has highlighted the Irish -born in Welsh counties and registration districts. Whereas Glamorgan had the largest increase of Irish-born (+ 6,563), the largest

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139 J. Hickey, M.A. thesis (U.C.W., Cardiff, 1959), p.106.

140 *ibid.*, p. 28, Note 24.

141 *ibid.*, pp. 118 - 121.

142 *ibid.*, p. 35.

percentage increase was in Cardiganshire (289%); Denbighshire followed with 226%. In 1851, Newport Registration District had 6.3% Irish-born, Cardiff 7.1%, Swansea 3%. Merthyr Tydfil had the largest number of Irish-born (3,646, or 4.7%) while, in North Wales, Wrexham Registration District had 711 (1.7%) and Holywell 615. In the town centres, or Irish areas, these percentages were, of course, higher.<sup>143</sup>

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143 F. Neal, *Black '47*, op. cit. pp. 116 – 117.

In North-east Wales, the numbers and percentages of the Irish-born and other Irish were as follows:

*Table 10: The Irish-born populations in North-East Wales Municipal and Parliamentary Boroughs, 1851 - 1881*

Year	Wrexham			Mold		
	Total Population	Irish-born	% Irish-born	Total Population	Irish-born	% Irish-born
1851	6,714	308	4.6%	3,432	151	4.4%
1861	7,562	381	5%	3,735	87	2.3%
1871	8,576	415	4.8%	4,534	133	2.9%
1881	10,978	348	3.2%	4,320	136	3.1%
	Flint			Holywell*		
	Total Population	Irish-born	% Irish-born	Total Population	Irish-born	% Irish-born
1851	3,296	16	0.5%	11,301	187	1.6%
1861	3,428	59	1.7%	10,292	75	0.7%
1871	4,269	251	5.9%	9,965	117	1.2%
1881	5,096	308	6%	7,862	56	0.7%

*Source:* Census Enumerators' Returns 1851 - 1881.

\*Slater's Directory (1868) gives the population for Holywell parish as 11,301 in 1851 and 10,292 in 1861; Worrall's Directory (1874) gives the population for the same parish as 9,965 in 1871. (County Record Office, Hawarden). The Census Records for 1861 are incomplete. The population figures for the two main areas where the Irish congregated were as follows: 4,307 in 1851; 2,442 in 1861; 3,033 in 1871 and 2,298 in 1881. These figures produce Irish-born percentages as follows: 1851 - 4.3%; 1861 - 3.1%; 1871 - 3.8%; 1881 - 2.4%.

All four towns showed a rise in Irish-born numbers, 1851 to 1871. Three towns experienced a decline - or at least a status quo - from 1871 to 1881 and although only Flint had an overall increase throughout the period, this increase was by no means steady, a four-fold increase having occurred in the 1860s. The peaks in numbers and percentages of the Irish-born in the four towns were as follows:

**Table 11: Highest numbers and highest percentages of the Irish-born in Wrexham, Mold, Flint and Holywell, 1851 – 1881**

Town	Highest Irish-born numbers	Highest Percentage of Irish-born
Wrexham	1871 (415)	1861 (5%)
Mold	1881 (136)	1851 (4.4%)
Flint	1881 (308)	1881 (6%)
Holywell	1851 (187)	1851 (1.6%)

*Source:* Census Enumerations' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

Irish communities - that is, Irish-born plus other Irish - within these towns varied from 1.1% in Holywell district in 1881 to 11% in Flint in 1871. Tables 12 and 13 show the size and percentage of the Irish communities.

**Table 12: The Irish populations in Wrexham, Mold, Flint and Holywell, 1851 - 1881.<sup>+</sup>**

Year	Wrexham	Mold	Flint	Holywell District <sup>*</sup>	Holywell Town <sup>**</sup>
1851	365 (5.4%)	188 (5.5%)	39 (1.2%)	239 (2.1%)	5.5%
1861	453 (5.9%)	167 (4.5%)	125 (3.6%)	93 (0.9%)	3.8%
1871	599 (7%)	149 (3.3%)	486 (11%)	217 (2.1%)	7.1%
1881	553 (5%)	183 (4.2%)	509 (10%)	87 (1.1%)	4.3%

<sup>+</sup> Figures include Irish-born plus their families and temporary lodgers, visitors, etc

<sup>\*</sup> Percentage of Irish in whole borough/parish.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Percentage of Irish in town centre.

*Source:* Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

**Table 13: The highest numbers and percentages of Irish populations.**

	Highest Numbers	Highest Percentages
Wrexham	1871 (599)	1871 (7%)
Mold	1851 (190)	1851 (8.1%)
Flint	1881 (509)	1871 (11%)
Holywell	1851 (239)	1851, 1871 (2.1%) District
		1871 (7.1%) Town

*Source:* Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

The Irish populations of Mold and Holywell showed similar characteristics, at least until 1871. Their Irish-born numbers declined from 1851 to 1861, then increased between 1861 and 1871, after which Mold's stabilised and Holywell's reached their lowest point. The total Irish population of Mold steadily declined until 1871, then increased till 1881; Holywell's total Irish population followed a similar peaks-and-troughs pattern to that of its Irish-born.

Wrexham's Irish-born increased in numbers until 1871 and then declined by 1881. Its Irish community as a whole grew by 24% from 1851 to 1861 and by 32% to its highest point in 1871, to fall back somewhat in the following decade. Flint was the odd one out with a twelve-fold increase in its Irish community over thirty years, together with a growth in its Irish-born to a figure nineteen times its original 1851 base. The decade, 1861 to 1871, saw the greatest leap in Flint's Irish numbers: by 361, or 43% of the town's population increase. (The comparable figure for Wrexham was 22.7%). In three of the towns, 1871 saw the highest percentage of Irish: Wrexham 7%; Holywell Town 7.1 %; Flint 11 %, the last being the highest percentage reached by the Irish in this survey.

To compare the Irish in North and South Wales at this time is not to compare like with like. In South Wales, all was on a grander scale: towns were larger, industry was greater, communications were more developed, work was more plentiful. The area was more affected than North Wales by the influx of Famine Irish into a situation which was itself in a state of flux. North Wales received its Irish at a secondary stage, counted in hundreds rather than thousands, but in the towns where a living could be made - Wrexham, Flint - the percentages of Irish were on a par with

those of the towns in the south. The Irish were fewer in the north, but their significance in their communities was no less.



## AGE PROFILES AND MARRIAGE PATTERNS

What was the composition of the Irish communities in Wrexham, Mold, Flint and Holywell? At what age did the Irish marry and to what extent did they remain single? What were the proportions of men to women over the period and were there any local factors which affected marriage patterns? This section will aim to flesh out the Irish presence in the four towns through age profiles, categorisation by sex and comparison of marriage trends.

### WREXHAM

Table 13 shows that of the four census years from 1851 to 1881, the highest number of recorded Irish was in 1871. In one of those years, 1861, females outnumbered males by eighteen. Married males never numbered more than married females for in 1851 there were five more married females; in 1861 there were twenty-two; in 1871, thirty-six and, in 1881, sixteen. Of the total Irish numbers, in 1851, the eighty-eight married males represented 24% and the ninety-three females 25%. Similarly, the one hundred and twelve single males represented 31 % of the total Irish in Wrexham and the seventy-two single females 20%. Most of the married Irish were to be found in the 19 to 60 age group, the numbers rising from 166 and 164 in 1851 and 1861 respectively to 219 and 210 in 1871 and 1881. In 1851, there were eight married males and two married females over the age of sixty; in 1861, the numbers were seven males and five females over sixty. These numbers rose in 1871 to twenty-one males and twelve females while in 1881 there were fifteen males and seventeen females, one male of whom was 80+ and one female over ninety. This increased longevity among the married Irish as the

century moved on may have had much to do with improved diet, sanitation and general public health.

As for single persons, only in 1861 did females outnumber males, by five, a year when eighty-one females were in the 0 to 18 age group and only nine in the 19 to 40 group. Indeed, the majority of the single females were always in the 0 to 18 years group, obviously still in the childhood or parent-dependent stages. In the 19 to 30 age group, the females were always fewer than half of the number of single 19 to 30 males (exception 1851: three males to two females). 1861 was a good year for marriage among the Wrexham Irish, no female seeming to have remained single after the age of forty.

In viewing the figures overall, we see that in 1851 there were 181 married Irish and an almost equal number of single Irish, 184. By 1861, the balance had shifted towards the unmarried, with 176 married and 193 single, and by 1871, this trend was confirmed with 252 married and 347 unmarried. However, it must be borne in mind that, of the 1871 singletons, 290 in number, or 84%, were under eighteen years of age, a situation reflected in 1881 when 247 of the 311 unmarried were in the 0 to 18 age group. In the 19 to 30 age group, Irish males formed the larger contingent and not by the small majority found nationally.<sup>144</sup> In 1851, Wrexham had twenty-one males of Irish stock, compared with thirteen females; in 1861, these comparative numbers were twenty and eight while, in 1871, they had become twenty-eight males and eight females. By 1881, the numbers stood at thirty-six males and seven females. This picture was reflected in the 19 to 40 age group.

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144 R.E. Swift, 'The Historiography of the Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in P.O'Sullivan, (ed), *The Irish in the New Communities*, Vol. 2 (1982), p. 57.

At this point, it may be worth considering whether the marriage patterns among Irish immigrants resembled those in Ireland itself after the Famine. The depopulation of Ireland in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries - largely a rural phenomenon - contained two obvious features: a decline in marriage and heavy emigration. Marriage in Ireland after the Famine declined with the result that, by 1911, approximately a quarter of all adults in the forty to fifty age group had never married.<sup>145</sup> Could the attitudes towards marriage that developed in the home country - with delayed marriage or even 'celibacy' becoming common post-Famine - have been reflected in the marriage patterns of the emigrants and their offspring in places like Wrexham?

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145 T. W. Guinnane, 'The Vanishing Irish: Ireland's Population from the Great Famine to the Great War', in *History Ireland*, Vol 5, No. 2 Summer 1997, p.33. But see J.Tosh, *A Man's Place - Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, (Yale U.P., 1999), p.172, where the author points out that middle-class males in the later nineteenth century tended to delay marriage until after the threshold of middle age: 'the flight from domesticity'.

Table 14: A comparison by numbers and percentage of age group of single and married Irish in Wrexham, 1851 – 1881.

Age Group	1851			1861			1871			1881		
	Total of Group	M	S	Total of Group	M	S	Total of Group	M	S	Total of Group	M	S
0-18	138	5	133	153	-	153	290	-	290	247	-	247
		4%	96%		-	100%		-	100%		-	100%
19-30	84	50	34	73	45	28	108	68	40	79	36	43
		60%	40%		62%	38%		63%	37%		45%	55%
31-40	60	51	9	52	49	3	77	67	10	77	68	9
		85%	15%		94%	6%		87%	13%		88%	12%
41-50	48	43	5	39	39	-	77	73	4	73	68	5
		90%	10%		100%	-		95%	5%		93%	7%
51-60	25	22	3	31	31	-	45	43	2	42	38	4
		88%	12%		100%	-		96%	4%		90%	10%
61-70	9	9	-	9	9	-	21	20	1	24	23	1
		100%			100%	-		95%	5%		96%	4%
71-80	-	-	-	3	3	-	12	12	-	9	8	1
		-	-		100%	-		100%	-		89%	11%

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

If one compares the single Irish with the married Irish in each age group one sees the expected increase in the percentage of marrieds in each year: the older the Irish, the greater the likelihood of marriage. TABLE 14 gives a chronological comparison of the percentage of the single Irish in each age group. In the 0 to 18 age group, the percentage of Wrexham's single Irish increased over the years. In the 19 to 30 age group, marriage among the Irish appeared to gain slightly in popularity, with the percentage of marrieds rising from 60% in 1851 to 63% in 1871; by 1881, however, the percentage of married Irish had fallen to 45%, perhaps due to an influx of single males looking for work in the developing town. In the next group, 31 to 40 years, the marrieds peaked in 1861 at 94%, remaining in the mid- and higher eighties

in the other years. The age groups from 41 to 80 years showed the dominance of marriage over the single state, with the Irish in 1861 all being married. Increased longevity among the Irish after 1861 was also evident with the over-fifties growing in numbers from 34 in 1851 and 43 in 1861 to 78 in 1871 and 75 in 1881.

There would seem therefore to have been an echo, however faint, in Wrexham at this time of the tendency to marry later pertaining in post-Famine Ireland. One born in, say, 1853 would have been eighteen by 1871 and, having seen during his or her adolescence a large number of unmarried adults in the Irish community, could well have been influenced to remain single or, at least, to have delayed marriage until an age unthinkable before the Great Famine in Ireland.

MOLD

In Mold in 1851, the Irish comprised 53% males and 47% females. Within these categories, 45% of the 99 males and 49% of the 89 females were married.

TABLE 16 shows the marital status of the Irish population in Mold in 1851 and 1861. Focusing on the main concentration of married Irish in Mold - that is, the 19 to 60 age group - and comparing their numbers with those of Wrexham, one finds the following: in 1851, Wrexham had 166 married Irish between the ages of 19 and 60, whereas Mold had 79, that is, fewer than half Wrexham's total. In 1861 the difference was not so pronounced, Wrexham 144 and Mold 83. The numbers were as follows:

Table 16: A comparison of the marital status of the Irish populations of Wrexham and Mold aged 19 to 60 years, 1851 and 1861.

Year	Age	Wrexham				Mold			
		Males	Females	Total	% of married Irish in total pop. of age band	Males	Females	Total	% of married Irish in total pop. of age band
1851	19-30	22	28	50	59.2%	11	18	29	54.7%
	31-40	24	27	51	85%	17	15	32	84.2%
	41-50	19	24	43	89%	5	4	9	90%
	51-60	12	10	22	88%	6	3	9	75%
				166					79
Year	Age	Wrexham				Mold			
		Males	Females	Total	% of married Irish in total pop. of age band	Males	Females	Total	% of married Irish in total pop. of age band
1861	19-30	15	30	45	61.6%	9	12	21	63.9%
	31-40	22	27	49	94%	16	14	30	93.7%
	41-50	20	19	39	100%	9	7	16	100%
	51-60	13	18	31	100%	8	8	16	94.1%
				144					83

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

The Irish community in Mold was as cautious about marriage as their counterparts in Wrexham. Four percent of Wrexham's Irish aged between 0 and 18 years in 1851 were married whereas none of Mold's Irish were similarly committed. The percentages of the 19 to 30 age groups in the two towns in 1851 were similar: 59% in Wrexham and 55% in Mold. For the 31 to 40 year group, the proportions were virtually the same, 85% and 84%. In this regard - that is, the post - Famine tendency to delay marriage - the Irish in both Wrexham and Mold displayed similar characteristics. Further analysis reveals that in Mold in 1851 the married Irish males aged 19 to 30 years, that is, eleven out of twenty-six, represented 42% of the Irishmen in that group and that similarly the married Irish women of the same age were 66% of the group, or eighteen out of 27. In the next age group, 31 to 40 years, seventeen out of twenty-two married Irishmen represented 77%, while fifteen out of sixteen Irish females represented 94%.

In 1851, the Irish community in Wrexham was almost twice the size of that in Mold (365 : 190); the percentages of Irish, however, in each town's population were very alike (5.4% and 5.5%). The marriage patterns of each town also had similarities. In the 0 to 18 age group, there were three married males and two married females in Wrexham compared with 77 single males and 56 single females; in Mold, in the same age group, there were no married Irish but 65 singletons. In Wrexham, in the next group, 19 to 30 years, the numbers of married and single mates were virtually equal (22 : 21) whereas there were more than twice as many married Irish women as there were single women. In Mold, the Irish women were in similar proportion to their counterparts in Wrexham: 18 married to nine single. In all the older groups, in both towns, there were always more married Irish than single Irish.

The main difference between Wrexham and Mold in 1861 was in the 0 to 18 age group. First, there were appreciably more single females in Wrexham than there had been ten years earlier, whereas Mold's figures for 1851 and 1861 remained virtually unchanged. Could this have been a reflection of the greater opportunities for employment for women in Wrexham? Secondly, in the next group, 19 to 30 years, one finds that in Wrexham there were twice as many females as married males, but in Mold there were only a third more. Thereafter, in the older age groups, differences between the sexes and their marital status were not so pronounced, in either town, advancing years perhaps having smoothed out anomalies.

Did these marriage patterns reflect stable economies and were they a measure of confidence in employment prospects? The mobility of the Irish could have been a responsive indicator of the volatility of a local economy and confidence in employment could have led to confidence in marriage. From 1851 to 1861, Wrexham was about twice the size of Mold, but from the 1860s Wrexham began to grow approximately two-and-a-half times faster. (Mold, 1851 - 1881, grew by 880, Wrexham by 4,264). If one compares the approximate ratio of the married Irish in the 19 to 30 age groups in the two towns, one sees a distinct change in favour of Wrexham in the 1871 figures:

1851		1861		1871		1881	
Wrexham	Mold	Wrexham	Mold	Wrexham	Mold	Wrexham	Mold
1.7	: 1	2	: 1	6	: 1	4	: 1

From the 1860s, confidence among the younger Irish, and among the town's incoming Irish could have been running higher than among the Mold Irish. 1871 showed a similar increase in the Wrexham : Mold ratios of married Irish in the older



age groups: among the 41 to 50 group, for instance, the ratio was 5:1 having been 3:1 in 1861.<sup>146</sup> Wrexham was growing in optimism and importance while Mold was becoming a backwater. Along with others, the Irish responded to such changes.

Table 17: The Marital Status and age groups of the total Irish population of Mold, 1851.

Age group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females	Total	Total of Married	% of Group Married
0-18	- -	32 (49%)	- -	33 (51%)	65	-	-
19-30	11 (21%)	15 (28%)	18 (34%)	9 (17%)	53	29	54%
31-40	17 (45%)	5 (13%)	15 (39%)	1 (3%)	38	32	84.2%
41-50	5	-	4	1	10	9	90%
	(50%)	-	(40%)	(1%)			
51-60	6	2	3	1	12	9	75%
	(50%)	(16%)	(25%)	(1%)			
61-70	5	-	4	-	9	-	100%
	(55%)	-	(44%)	-			
71-80	1	-	-	-	1	1	100%
Total	45	54	44	45	188		
	45.5%	54.5%	50.5%	49.5%			
	Of all Males		Of all Females				

Source: Census Enumerators’ Returns, 1851.

146 Source: Census Returns, Wrexham and Mold, 1851 to 1881.

Table 18: The Marital Status and age groups of the total Irish population of Mold, 1861.

Age group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females	Total	Total of Married	% of Group Married
0-18	- -	33 (52%)	- -	31 (48%)	64	-	-
19-30	9 -	8 -	12 -	4 -	33	21	63.6%
31-40	16 (50%)	1 (3%)	14 (44%)	1 (3%)	32	30	93.7%
41-50	9	-	7	-	16	16	100%
	(56%)	-	(44%)	-			
51-60	8	1	8	-	17	16	94.1%
	(47%)	(6%)	(47%)	-			
61-70	2	1	-	-	3	2	66.6%
	(66%)	-	(33%)	-			
71-80	-	-	-	-	-	-	100%
81-90	2	-	-	-	2	2	100%
	(100%)	-	-	-			
Total	46	44	41	36	167		
	51.1%	48.9%	53.2%	46.8%			
	Of all Males		Of all Females				

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1861.

## HOLYWELL

In all age groups in Holywell in 1851 there was little difference between the numbers of Irish males and females. For instance, single males aged between 0 and 18 years numbered 38 while the total for corresponding females was 32. In the 19 to 30 age group there were five married males and five married females, while in the next group, 31 to 40 years, there were 16 married males and 15 married females. This was the pattern for the remaining groups. In 1861, the numbers of single males and single females aged 0 to 18 years were in balance, 29 and 27 respectively. In the 19 to 30 age group, distribution was almost equal, although in the following group, 31 to 40 years, married females were in the majority over married males, by 10 to 6, a situation reversed in the 51 to 60 group where it was nine married males to five married females. In 1871, Holywell's Irish population had more than doubled, to 259, the main increases being in the 19 to 70 years sector. It is, however, notable that the ageing of the town's Irish was arrested in 1871, the 125 over-nineteens being outnumbered by 134 under-eighteens. That is, 48% were aged 19 to 90 years, and 52% under eighteen. In other years between 1851 and 1881, the 19 to 90s were in the majority: 1851 - 50%; 1861 - 51%; 1881 - 52%. By 1881, the situation resembled its 1861 predecessor, with nineteen males and twenty females in the 19 to 60 sector. The 1871 increase must have been caused by incomers, probably in response to better employment prospects in nearby Deeside, as the numbers in 1861 would not, of themselves, account for such enlargement and change in distribution.

TABLES 19 and 20 show the numbers, percentages and marital status of each group of Irish in Holywell, 1851 to 1881. Two features stand out: the decreasing incidence of marriage in the 0 to 30 age group and the peaking of numbers in 1871. Each Irish group increased in 1871, paradoxically a year when the

town as a whole decreased in number by 327. No Irish between 0 and 18 years were enumerated as married between 1851 and 1881, while, in the 19 to 30 group, the percentage of married Irish declined from 71% in 1851 to 21% thirty years later. In their later years the Holywell Irish were almost all married. To account in economic or employment terms for the increase of Irish in 1871 has its difficulties for the area suffered an economic slump in 1869 - 70. Paper milling and copper processing were carried out in the nearby Greenfield Valley, but the Mold cotton mill had been destroyed in 1866 and Holywell's woollen mill closed at this time. The fact remains, however, that the Irish numbers more than doubled in Holywell between 1861 and 1871 and returned to their previous levels by 1881. One other fact emerges from the Holywell Irish numbers: after 1851, the sizes of the Irish populations did not substantially differ. Indeed, in the most mobile of groups, 19 to 30 years, the numbers of single males and single females were virtually the same, reinforcing the picture of the independent Irish woman migrating on her own.

Table 19: The Marital Status and age groups of the Irish population in Holywell, 1851 to 1881\*

1851				
Age Group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females
0-18	-	38	-	32
19-30	5	2	5	2
31-40	16	-	15	-
41-50	5	-	3	-
51-60	4	-	2	-
61-70	2	-	1	-
71-80	1	-	-	-
81-90	-	-	-	-
Totals	33	40	29	34
Males 73		Females 63		
Total 136				

1861				
Age Group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females
0-18	-	29	-	27
19-30	5	4	4	5
31-40	6	2	10	-
41-50	3	-	4	-
51-60	9	-	5	1
61-70	5	-	4	1
71-80	-	-	1	-
81-90	-	-	-	1
Totals	28	35	28	34
Male 63		Female 62		
Total 125				

1871				
Age Group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females
0-18	-	70	-	64
19-30	4	9	10	10
31-40	15	2	16	2
41-50	10	2	6	-
51-60	11	-	10	-
61-70	6	-	7	-
71-80	2	-	2	-
81-90	1	-	-	-
Totals	49	83	51	76
Male 132		Female 127		
Total 259				

1881				
Age Group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females
0-18	-	34	-	28
19-30	2	7	2	8
31-40	3	-	6	1
41-50	8	-	10	1
51-60	6	-	2	-
61-70	2	-	5	-
71-80	1	-	1	-
81-90	1	-	1	-
Totals	23	41	27	38
Male 64		Female 65		
Total 129				

\*Excluding lodgers, visitors, temporary residents

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

Table 20: The Numbers in each age group of married and single Irish in Holywell, 1851 to 1881.

Age Group	1851			1861			1871			1881		
	Age Group Total	M.	S.	Age Group Total	M.	S.	Age Group Total	M.	S.	Age Group Total	M.	S.
0-18	70	-	70	56	-	56	134	-	134	62	-	62
19-30	14	10	4	18	9	9	33	14	19	19	4	15
31-40	31	31	-	18	16	2	35	31	4	10	9	1
41-50	9	8	1	7	7	-	18	16	2	19	18	1
51-60	7	7	-	15	14	1	21	21	-	8	8	-
61-70	4	4	-	10	9	1	13	13	-	7	7	-
71-80	2	2	-	1	1	-	4	4	-	2	2	-
81-90	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	-
Totals	137	62	75	125	56	69	259	100	159	128	49	19

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

## FLINT

The Irish community of Flint in 1851 was small, thirty-nine in all, or 1.2% of the town's population. Irish males outnumbered Irish females, by 22 to 17, and singletons their married compatriots by 24 to 15. All sixteen single males and seven females were in the under-eighteen age group. Most married males were aged from 19 to 40 years while the married females were concentrated in the 31 to 40 and the 41 to 50 age groups, with one aged 19 to 30 and one in each of the remaining three groups, from 51 to 80 years. None of the under-eighteens was married; 75% of the 19 to 30s were. All of the 31 to 40s were married. After the age of 41, women dominated the married category, six to nil. The Irish community in Flint was a comparatively young one, with almost 60% under 18 years of age, and yet the average of those born in Ireland was 38.4 years, that of the males being 30.5 years and of the females 45 years. By 1861, the town's Irish had grown in number to 120, or 3.5% of the population. As in 1851, the Irish community in Flint was a young one with 47% under the age of fifteen years and 55% under 18. Thirty-four were aged over 31 (28%), while the oldest was 62-years old James Murphy, a labourer in the chemical works. Unlike the situation ten years earlier, Irish women outnumbered Irish males by 67 to 53, but the greatest imbalance was in the number of singletons - 24 bachelors to 42 spinsters - practically all of whom were living with their parents. The majority of married Irish, 18 of each sex, were to be found in the 19 to 40 age group, 84% of whom were in the state of matrimony.

It was in 1871 that the Irish were shown to have become a significant element in the town: 480 members, or 11% of Flint's total. As one would expect, in street concentrations the Irish-born reached as high as 20% and, in one case, 33%. Flint's Irish 'colony' was well in evidence by this time, to stay in place at least for the

following decade. As one would expect, the Irish community was growing older with 33% of all males and 45% of all females being married. In the 19 to 30 age group, 19 males and 22% females were married but the largest group was aged 31 to 40 years, 35 men and 36 women. Twenty-one married males and 18 married females were 41 to 50 years old; thereafter, males and females in the 51 to 60 age group were equal in number with ten in each. The 0 to 18 group contained 221, with 119 males and 102 females, while, at the opposite end of the scale, six married men and one married woman achieved the 61 to 70 age group. Beyond that, one married woman attained each of the remaining two groups, 71 to 80 years and 81 to 90 years. In summary, 4.4% of Flint's Irish in the 19 to 30 age group were married, 83% of its 31 to 40 group, 83% of its 41 to 50 group and 87% of its 51 to 60 group. All its post-61 years members were married or widowed. This community was maturing, for the first time since 1851 having more over-19s than under-18s, that is, 265 to 221. Ten years earlier, there had been 66 under 18s and 54 older Irish.

Flint's Irish population numbered 561 by 1881, 11 % of the town's total. The marital composition of the Irish community had not changed drastically from its state ten years earlier. In the 19 to 30 age group, the percentage of married people had decreased since 1871, from 43% to 35%, but for the 31 to 70 group - the generality of Irish - the numbers and percentage in all categories had gone up, from 136 to 171 and from 88% to 92%. In the 0 to 18s, there were more single males than single females and for the first time in thirty years an under-eighteen married woman was recorded. There were 18 married males and 21 married females in the 19 to 30 age group, who, together with twelve single females, gave a picture similar to that of 1871. However, there were 59 single males in this group, many more than the single females and fourteen more than in 1871. There were no single females in the 31 to



40 age group and six fewer single males than in the previous enumeration. Ninety percent of this total age group were married. This was virtually the situation in the next group, 41 to 50 years. Married males and females had increased in numbers and percentage since 1871 and, once more, there were no single females. In the 51 to 60 category, the 36 married Irish equalled 92% of the total whereas the 20 in 1871 represented only 87%. Thereafter, although the numbers increased, the percentage went down. There was a slight increase over 1871 in the percentage of Irish being married, 35% of males and 47% of females. A notable increase over 1871 was in the number of Irish more than 51 years: 59 in 1881 whereas there were only 33 in 1871. In 1881 also, there were 21 over 61 years where there were only nine in 1871. (SEE TABLE 21)

The Irish community had grown fourteen-fold from 39 in 1851 to 561 in 1881. At the start of the period, the Irish comprised 1.2% of the town's population, but, by its end, 11%. The decade between 1861 and 1871 saw the largest growth which was undoubtedly linked to the availability of work in developing Deeside. The group which experienced the greatest reinforcement was that most in search of employment, that is, those between 19 and 40 years of age.

By 1881, Denbighshire and Flintshire had 24.1 % of the population of North Wales and 12.2% of the country's total numbers. They were two of the seven Welsh counties which grew from 1851 to 1881. Likewise, the Irish population of these two counties increased, at different rates in different towns. In Wrexham, the incidence of marriage increased among the 19 to 30 year old Irish until 1871 then fell dramatically in 1881; that is, the average of 61.5% married persons was reduced to 45%. The chances of living beyond 60 years were improved for the Irish after 1861.

In a comparison of Wrexham and Mold, there is some evidence to suggest that, for the Irish, marriage patterns were affected by economic optimism, the incidence of marriage being higher in Wrexham than in Mold. In Holywell, no under-eighteens were married, but after the age of 31 the married Irish outnumbered the singletons. Flint's Irish population began with small numbers, but grew rapidly.

Table 21: The marital status and age groups of the Irish population in Flint, 1851 to 1881.

1851					1861				
Age Group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females	Age Group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females
0-18	-	16	-	7	0-18	-	24	-	42
19-30	2	-	1	1	19-30	5	4	9	2
31-40	4	-	2	-	31-40	13	1	9	-
41-50	-	-	3	-	41-50	3	-	4	-
51-60	-	-	1	-	51-60	2	-	1	-
61-70	-	-	1	-	61-70	1	-	-	-
71-80	-	-	1	-	71-80	-	-	-	-
Totals	6	16	9	8	Totals	24	29	23	44
Males 22		Females 17			Males 53		Females 67		
Total 39		Total 120							

1871					1881				
Age Group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females	Age Group	Married Males	Single Males	Married Females	Single Females
0-18	-	119	-	102	0-18	-	136	-	113
19-30	19	45	24	10	19-30	18	59	21	12
31-40	35	13	36	1	31-40	32	7	32	-
41-50	21	5	8	3	41-50	36	7	27	-
51-60	10	3	10	-	51-60	18	2	18	1
61-70	6	-	1	-	61-70	8	-	10	1
71-80	-	-	1	-	71-80	-	-	2	-
81-90	-	-	1	-	81-90	-	-	-	-
Totals	91	185	88	116	Totals	112	211	111	127
Males 276		Females 204			Males 323		Females 238		
Total 480		Total 561							

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

Year	Anglesey	Caerns.	Denbs.	Flints.	Mer.	Mont.	Total	% of Wales Pop.	
1851	57,327	87,870	92,583	68,156	38,843	67,335	412,114	35.44	
1861	54,609	95,694	100,778	69,737	38,963	66,919	426,700	33.32	
1871	51,040	106,121	105,101	76,312	46,598	67,623	452,796	32.05	
1881	51,416	119,349	111,740	80,587	52,038	65,718	480,848	30.59	
1891	50,098	118,204	117,872	77,277	49,212	58,003	471,166	26.59	
1851 - 91	-7,229	+30,334	+25,289	-9,121	+10,369	-9,332	+59,052	-	
Town(s) 1851 - 91	Beaumaris 2,599 - 2,202	Bangor 6,338-9,892	Wrexham 6,714-12,552	Flint 3,296-5,247	Ffestiniog 3,460-11,073	Newtown 6,559-6,610 (1881: 7,170)			
	Holyhead 5,622-8,745	Caernarfon 8,674-9,804		Mold 3,432-4,457		Welshpool 6,564-6,501 (1881: 7,107)			
	TOTAL POPULATION OF WALES 1851-1891								
Year			Total	Irish-born					
1851			1,163,139	20,730				1.78	
1861			1,280,413	28,089				2.18	
1871			1,412,583	22,007				1.55	
1881			1,571,780	22,872				1.45	
1891			1,771,451	19,613				1.10	
Year	Brecon.	Cards.	Carms.	Glam.	Mon.	Pemb.	Radnor	Total	% of Wales Pop.
1851	61,474	70,796	110,632	231,849	157,418	94,140	24,716	751,025	64.56
1861	61,627	72,245	111,796	317,752	174,633	96,278	25,382	859,713	67.14
1871	59,901	73,441	115,710	397,859	195,448	91,998	25,430	959,787	67.94
1881	57,746	70,270	124,864	511,433	211,267	91,824	23,528	1,090,932	69.40
1891	57,031	62,630	130,566	687,218	252,416	89,133	21,791	1,300,785	73.43
1851 - 91	-4,443	-8,166	+19,934	+455,369	+94,998	-5,007	-2,925	549,760	-
Town(s) 1851-91	Brecon	Aberystwyth 5,231-6,725	Cardmarthen 10,524-10,338	Cardiff 18,351-128,915	Newport 19,323-54,707	Pembroke 10,107-14,978			
	5,673-5,646		Llanelli 8,415-23,937	Rhondda 1,998-88,351	Tredgar 8,305-17,341	Haverfordwest 6,580-6,179			

Source: John Williams - Digest of Welsh Statistical Statistics, Vol 1. (Government Statistical Service 1985).

## SUMMARY

From 1851 to 1881, the population of Wales increased, (See TABLE 22) but six counties - those remote from the industrial centres - declined. Denbighshire and Flintshire were among those which increased. In three of the North - East Wales towns, the Irish population declined over the period; in the other - Flint - it increased. 1871 was the year when the Irish communities in three of the towns reached their highest percentages: 7% in Wrexham, 7.1% in Holywell and 11% in Flint - percentages similar to those of the Irish in South Wales towns. In general, the older the Irish, the more likely they were to be married. This echoed, if only slightly, the tendency to marry late which was seen in post-Famine Ireland, but reflected more strongly the degree of economic confidence to be found in each town at a given time.

CHAPTER FOUR

SETTLEMENT

AND

A FAMILY STUDY

## LOCATION OF THE IRISH IN THE FOUR TOWNS

The differences between these towns were to be seen most clearly during their periods of growth and decline. As previously stated, their development although rooted in similar geology and location, showed different rates of growth in response to local and national stimuli. Wrexham, until the middle of the nineteenth century, grew quietly as a market town with its associated crafts and trades; Mold maintained a slow growth rate until 1871, after which it declined. Flint's population growth was a modest 132 between 1851 and 1861 and then the town grew by 800 in each of the following decades. Holywell declined over the period by 3,439 people, by 30% from 11,301 to 7,862. Within the total population of each town, the Irish element reached its peak at different times. Holywell and Mold had their largest numbers of Irish in 1851, Wrexham in 1871. Sometime between 1861 and 1871, Flint experienced a four-fold surge of Irish, which was maintained until 1881 and beyond.

Despite differences of time and scale, each town was similar in respect of the location of its Irish: they were to be found in one or two distinct areas. While not ghettos, these neighbourhoods had a palpable Irish character. In Wrexham, they were clearly in evidence around St Giles parish church and, a few hundred yards to the west, in Brook St and Pentrefelin. The Irish were also grouped, though less exclusively, in two main areas in Flint, especially in the years between 1851 and 1871, while in Mold most were to be found between the castle mound and the parish church, in an area known as Bedlam, although it must be stressed that the name had been given long before the Irish had arrived there. As in Wrexham and Flint, the Irish were in two areas in Holywell, in the north and west and the south and east of

the town, with the High Street with its sprinkling of Irish acting as a link between them. In short, the mass of Irish arrived at different times in these four towns, but their patterns of settlement had distinct similarities.

#### WREXHAM: LOCATION AND OCCUPANCY

Where in Wrexham were the Irish to be found? Throughout the period under consideration the Irish were most prominent in two areas, south and east of the parish church of St Giles and some four hundred yards away to the west in Brook Street and Pentrefelin; they were also of some statistical significance in the north-east of the town, in the Beast Market area. Obviously, the Irish were to be found in other parts of Wrexham but not in such numbers and not in such density of street occupancy. FIGURES 1 to 4 give a generalised picture of the numbers, percentage occupancy and areas involved and from these may be seen that if any part of the town could be called an Irish quarter it was the Mount Street, Yorkshire Square, Tuttle and Yorke Street area. Yorkshire Square, for example, never fell below a fifty percent Irish occupancy and, in 1871, the Irish dominated with 93% of the Square's population. However, too much emphasis upon the percentages of Irish presence in individual streets would be unwise for statistics can often conceal important local factors. For example, Salop Road's thirteen percent Irish in 1851 may have been more 'visible' than its thirteen percent in 1871 although smaller numbers were involved. Again, too much importance should not be accorded to the separateness of streets as they were, in fact, so close together as often to form one precinct, sharing a common back area, as in the case of Tuttle and Mount Streets and Salop Road.

Brook Street and Pentrefelin however formed a distinct enclave and FIGURES 1 to 4 show how the area's population grew over thirty years. The percentage of Irish declined from 37% to 20% over the period but not as much as that of Mount Street.



This area along the river was one of the older parts of Wrexham and, as its names imply, was concerned initially with a water-based economy: brewing and milling along the River Gwenfro.<sup>147</sup> It was a dilapidated area and one which offered cheap, if squalid, accommodation to the poor of the town, including the Irish.

Other streets also grew in significance as Irish areas. Yorke Street, for instance, moved over thirty years from having little or no Irish presence to a 31.5% occupancy, an increase due perhaps to the arrival of one large extended family (of whom more later). A similar picture emerged over the years in Salop Road, 7.5% to 46% Irish presence. Yorkshire Square - always a poor area with never less than a 50% Irish occupancy - had its largest Irish occupancy in 1871, 93%; on the other hand, a neighbouring street, Tuttle Street, would seem to have lost its significant Irish membership after 1861. This may have been due to the expansion in the street of a commercial brewery reducing the number of houses available for rent; furthermore, the statistics for 1871 and 1881 have been combined so that those for Tuttle Street are included in those for Yorkshire Square.<sup>148</sup> Mount Street, after its initial highest percentage in 1851, maintained a steady Irish occupancy until 1871, of between 19% and 22.5%, after which it rose to 32%.

Their numbers may have declined but the Irish-born in Wrexham tended to live in the same locations throughout our period. Tuttle Street, Yorke Street, Mount Street -all clustered round the parish church - may have had the strongest claim to be

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147 Pentrefelin: the village of the mill.

148 A.H. Dodd, *A History of Wrexham*, (1989), pp.85 and 123: the Willow Brewery in Tuttle Street was purchased in 1896 by the Wrexham Town Council for the building of Public Baths. See also Island Green, 1851, with its 25% Irish (Figure 1). This area was called Ireland Green until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in 1850 became the site of a brewery. A.N. Palmer, *History of the Town of Wrexham*, (Wrexham, 1823), re-printed Bridge Books, Wrexham 1982, p.234.

dubbed an Irish quarter but this claim grew distinctly weaker as the century progressed. From TABLE 23 it may be seen that in Yorkshire Square, for instance, numbers dwindled from ninety-four Irish-born in 1851 to twenty-four in 1881. Tuttle Street had eighteen Irish-born in 1841 - a figure which rose to one hundred and three in 1861 - and returned to its total of eighteen again in 1881. Yorke Street, with its twelve Irish-born in 1851, reached its peak of thirty-seven in 1871 and declined slightly to thirty-five ten years later. Mount Street was less volatile with its fifty-three Irish-born in 1851, its twenty more in 1861, its eighty-one in 1871 and, in 1881, its sixty-eight - a range of twenty-eight in thirty years. (See TABLE 23).

The streets and courtyards around Brook Street and Pentrefelin were another identifiable 'Irish' area. In 1851, Brook Street had fifty-one Irish-born, a total which rose to ninety-one in 1871; ten years later it had fallen to eleven. By 1871, Bellevue Road appeared in the statistics of the Irish-born. This road ran off Brook Street and Pentrefelin and became an area of re-location for the Irish in the town. In the 1851 census no Irish-born were enumerated in Bellevue Road and its adjuncts, but in 1881 the road was one of only two which showed an increase over 1871 in their Irish-born population; Salop Road was the other. It was significant that both Bellevue and Salop Roads were adjacent to Wrexham's two Irish 'heartlands', one found along the River Gwenfro and the other around the church. In Wrexham at least, the Irish diaspora was over: From 1871 onwards it was a slow seepage outwards from their original 'landfalls' into adjacent streets, not a flight to distant parts.

Sometime between the 1871 and 1881 censuses was a watershed when Irish-born numbers in Wrexham fell, in total numbers and in street density. Obviously, the older Irish-born were dying off and were not replaced in similar numbers;

furthermore, dispersion about the town reduced density in so-called Irish areas. There were, of course, exceptions to this and TABLE 23 shows these anomalies. Yorke Street had 16.4% Irish-born in 1871 and 22% in 1881 with but two fewer Irish-born. This was due to a smaller overall population in 1881, one hundred and sixty against two hundred and twenty-five ten years earlier. Seven-Bridge Street in 1851 had twenty-eight Irish-born out of a total, which gave 13% Irish-born; here, however, distortion of the overall picture occurred because twenty-four of these twenty-eight Irish-born were in two houses. Similarly, Tuttle Street's twenty-nine Irish-born included thirteen who lived in one house, that is, 45% of the street's Irish-born were under one roof, a concentration which must have affected how the Irish were perceived.

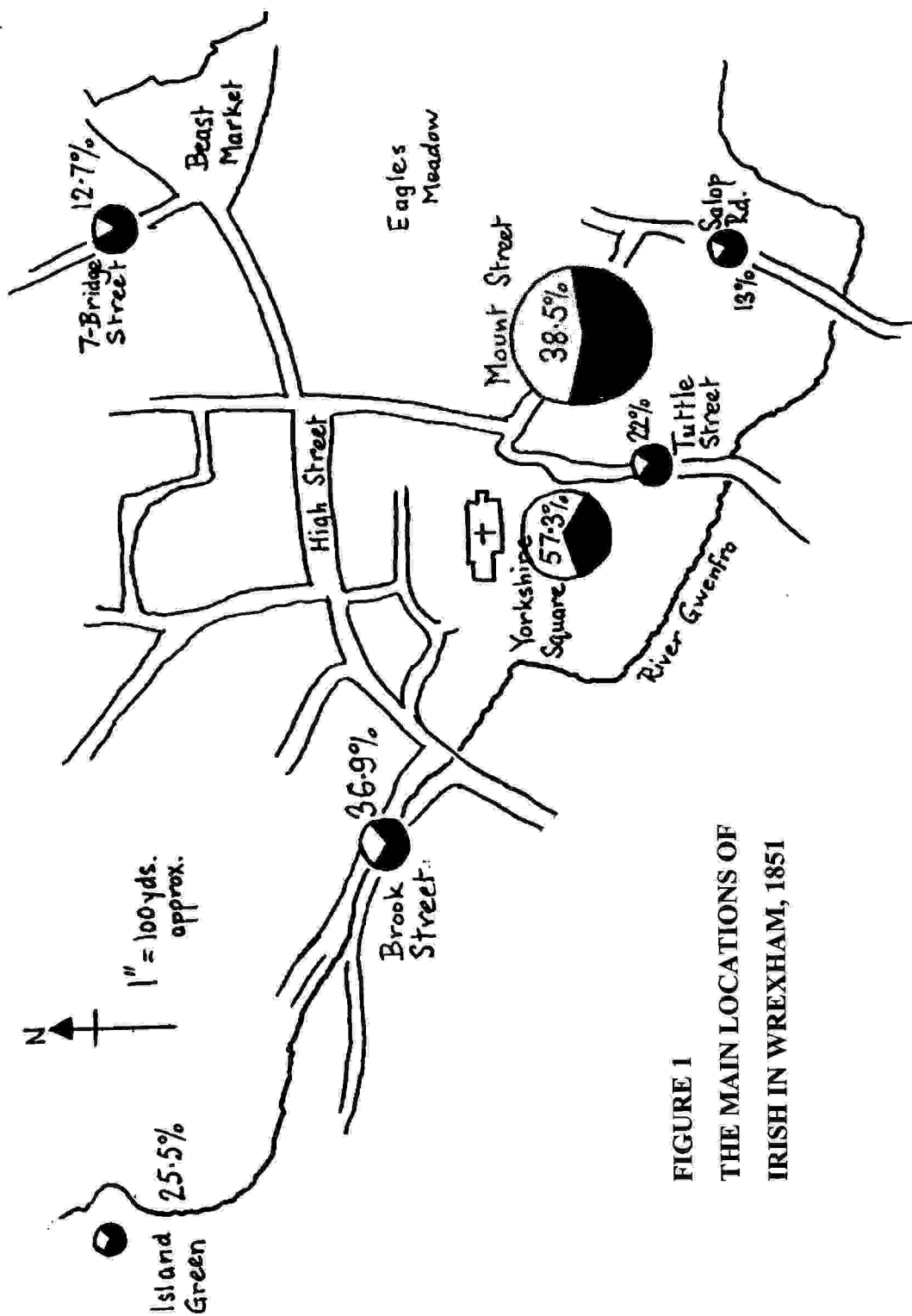


FIGURE 1  
THE MAIN LOCATIONS OF  
IRISH IN WREXHAM, 1851

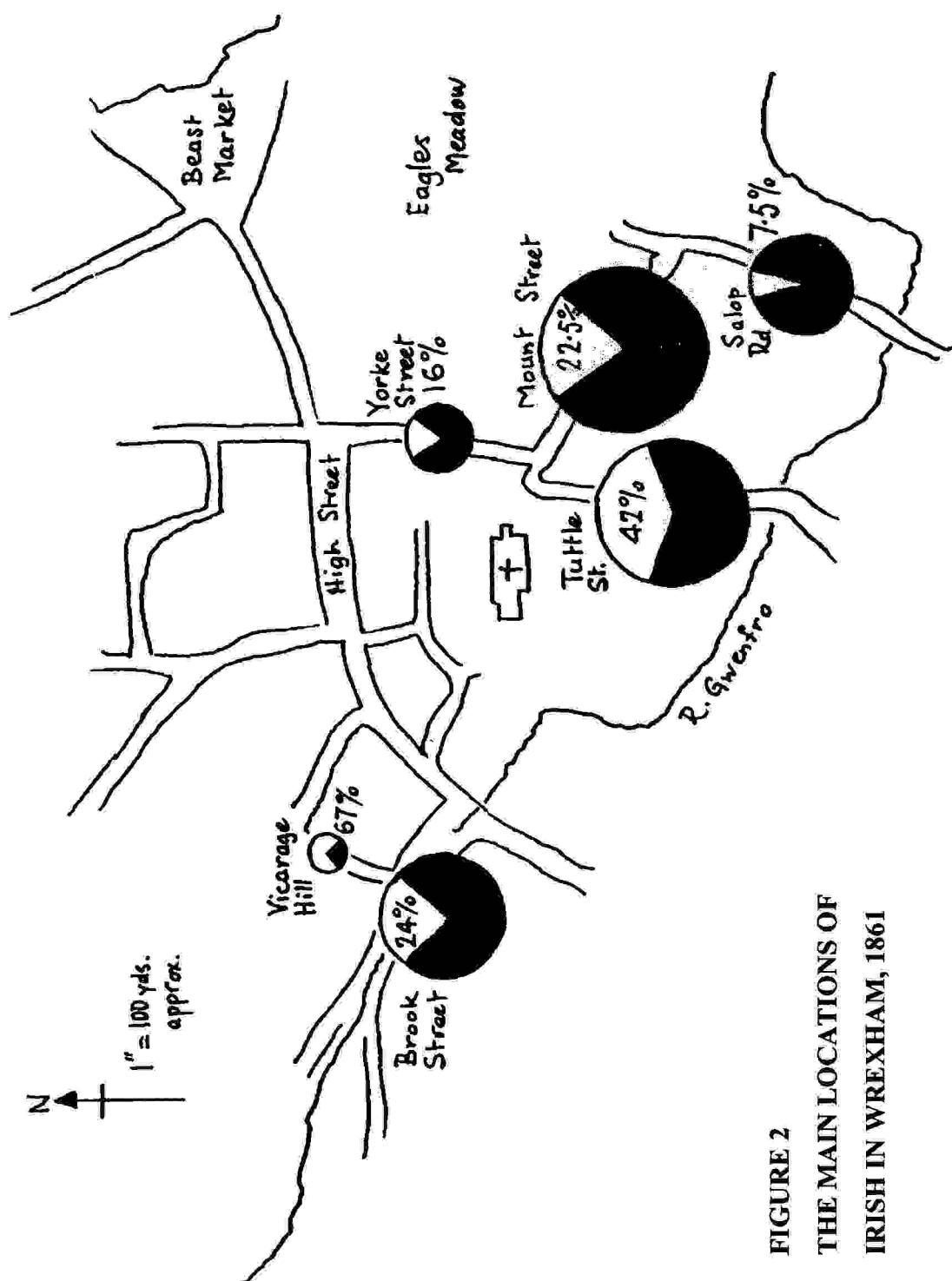


FIGURE 2  
THE MAIN LOCATIONS OF  
IRISH IN WREXHAM, 1861

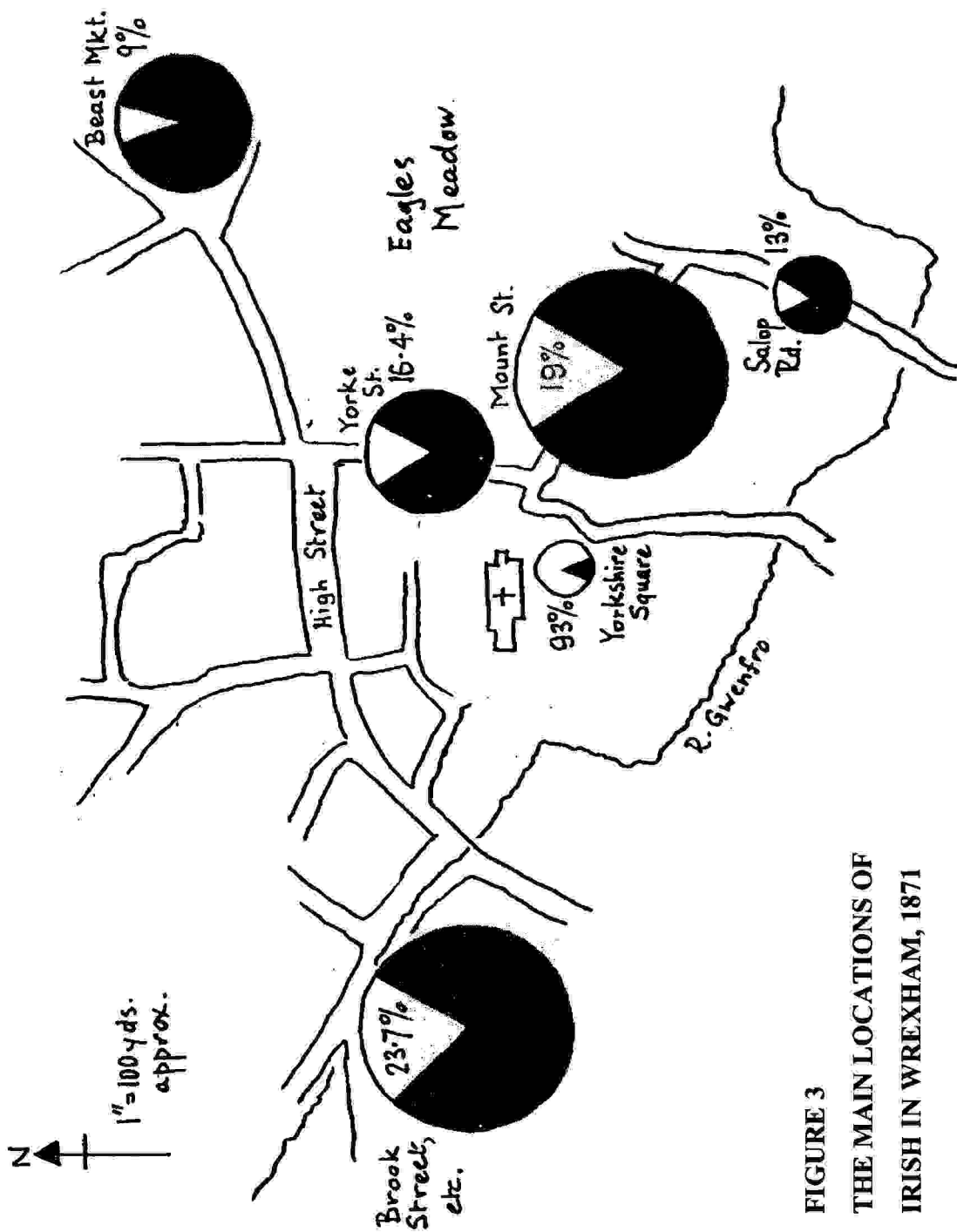


FIGURE 3  
THE MAIN LOCATIONS OF  
IRISH IN WREXHAM, 1871

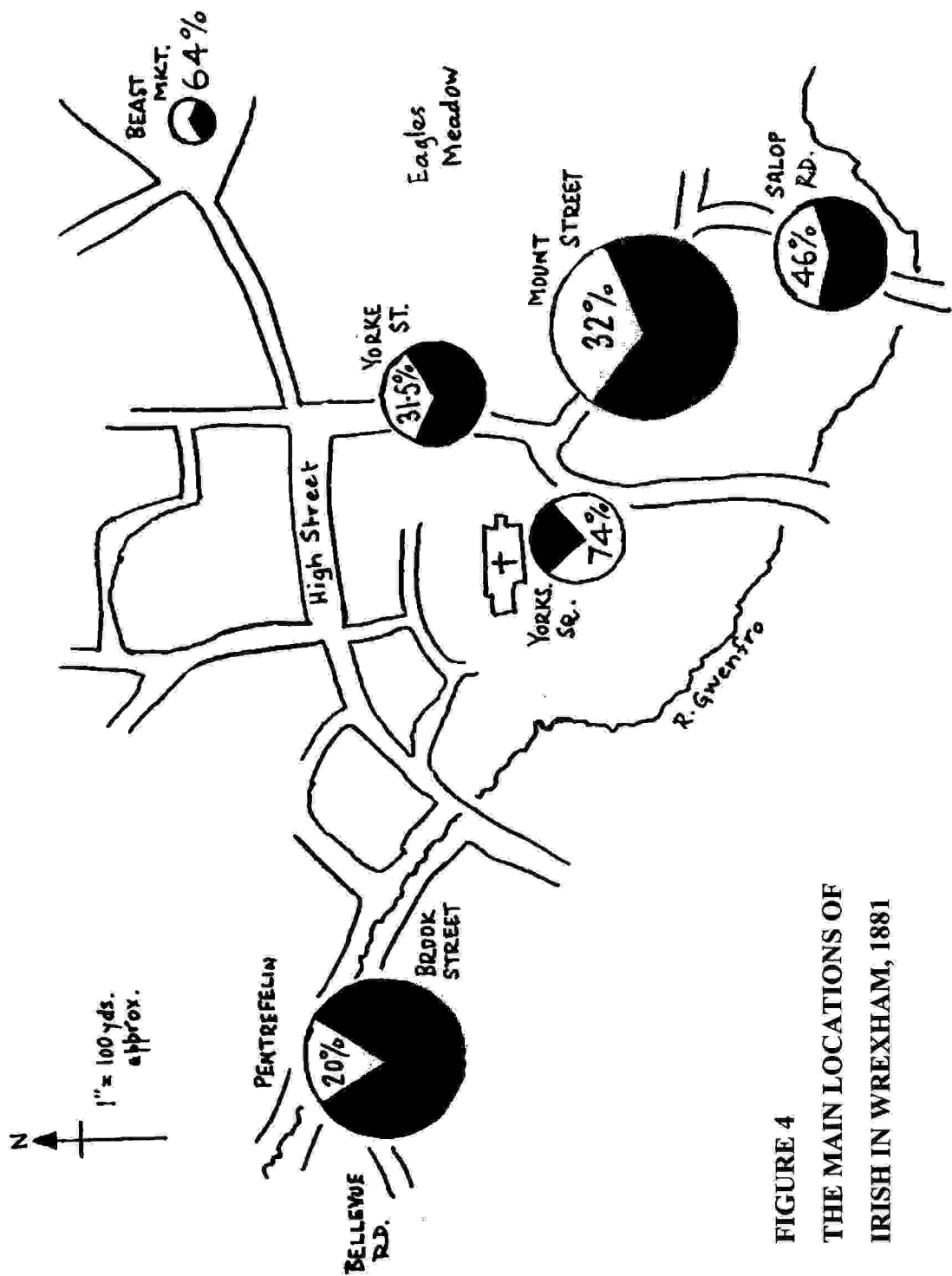


FIGURE 4  
THE MAIN LOCATIONS OF  
IRISH IN WREXHAM, 1881

Table: 23: Irish-born in selected Wrexham streets, 1841 - 1881

Street	1841			1851			1861			1871			1881			Av % by Street 1841- 81	Ref
	I-B	Total	% I-B	I-B	Total	% I-B	I-B	Total	% I-B	I-B	Total	% I-B	I-B	Total	% I-B		
Yorkshire Sq.	25	78	32	94	164	57	-	-	-	72	117	61	24	64	38	38 to 47	1
Futtle St.	18	282	6.3	29	130	22	103	376	27	40	43	93	18	47	38	37	2
Yorke St.	1	200	0.5	12	239	5	20	125	16	37	225	16.4	35	160	22	12	3
Mount St.	38	300	13	53	374	14	73	427	17	81	537	15	68	537	13	14	4
Brook St.	22	255	8.6	51	138	37	54	330	16	91	431	21	11	84	13	19	5
The Walks & Island Green	14	112	12.5	50	191	26				-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Beast Market	-	-	-	8	555	1.5	-	-	-	37	389	9.5	-	-	-	-	7
Seven-Bridge St.	-	-	-	28	220	13	-	-	-	16	47	34	14	39	36	-	8
Madeira Hill & Area	-	-	-	15	194	8	1	50	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Bellevue Rd.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	52	172	30	76	393	18	-	10
Salop Rd.	33	181	18	19	146	13	17	225	7.5	25	198	12.6	41	175	23	15	11
Ref	A			B			C			D			E				

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 - 1881.

### Notes:

C2: 27% Irish-born but 42% Irish-born + 'other' Irish.

C9: 2% but 6% with 'other' Irish.

E3: 22% but 31% with 'other' Irish.

Blank boxes = no Irish-born encountered in returns; missing data; streets merged with others for census.



## MOLD: LOCATION AND OCCUPANCY

Whereas Wrexham, Holywell and Flint, over the years of this study, each possessed at least two areas of Irish concentration, Mold had only one. The enclave consisting of Bulleys Yard, Henffordd and Milford Street was the only part the town could justifiably call its Irish area: at the northern end of the High Street, an area bounded by Bailey Hill and Saint Mary's parish church. This sloped down to terrain full of mine workings and spoil heaps; beyond was the flood plain of the River Alyn. (TABLE 24 gives the figures for the enclave, 1851 to 1881).

Bulleys Yard was not enumerated separately after the 1851 census. It did, however, in that year, have the highest concentration of Irish-born in all four census counts: 82 Irish-born, or 73%. Henffordd and Milford Street could only muster 34% and 8% respectively. The total population of the Yard, 112, lived with an average of 4.1 to a house, whereas its Irish lived 4.6 to a house. Henffordd had a slightly higher population, 118, but many fewer Irish-born, that is, 40, or 34%. Its house occupancy was higher, with an average of 5.6 per house, but 6.6 per Irish house. There were 359 people in Milford Street but only 29 Irish-born, or 8%. The average per house was 4.6, but the Irish house had an average of 7, a figure indicating that there were only three or four Irish houses in the street. The figures relating to the Irish in Milford Street were to change greatly at the next census enumeration. In 1851, the Irish as a whole formed 38% of the enclave's total population.

By 1861, Bulleys Yard and Henffordd had 'disappeared', only Milford Street being enumerated. The total population of the street was 493. There were 82 Irish-born, or 16.6%, but, with the number of other Irish added, the Irish constituency rose

to 176, or 35.6%. The average occupancy for the street was 4.6, the same density as in 1851, while that for the Irish houses fell from 7 to 4.5.

Henffordd re-appeared in the 1871 census, but Bulleys Yard was to remain 'lost' as a separate entity. By this, Henffordd had a total population of 141 and Milford Street 340, in all 481. Their respective totals of Irish-born were 24 and 47, or 17% and 13.8%. Together, the Irish-born in both streets represented 14.7% of the population. Other Irish in Henffordd numbered 36, giving a total percentage of all Irish of 42.5%; in Milford Street, the corresponding figure was 42 which, together with 47 Irish-born, represented 26% Irish. The average density of occupancy in both Henffordd and Milford Street was 4.4 per house, but that of Irish houses varied from 3.1 in Henffordd to 4.7 in Milford Street. The density of Irish occupancy in Henffordd had fallen by half since 1851 and in Milford Street by 2.3. There was to be a rise by 1881, although not a return to 1851 levels.

The total population of the area in 1881 was 453, with 151 in Henffordd and 301 in Milford Street. Within these totals there were 28 Irish-born in Henffordd and 51 in Milford Street, giving 18.5% and 16.8% respectively. Other Irish numbered 39 and 68, so that Henffordd had an Irish population of 67, or 44%, and Milford Street had 119, or 39.5%. In all, the area had 186 Irish, or 41% of its total population. These lived at an average density of 4.75 per house in Henffordd and 5.6 in Milford Street, compared with an average overall density for the enclave of 4.45 per house.

Table 24: The numbers and percentages of the Irish Population in Mold, 1851 – 1881, with average numbers of house occupancy.

1881	Average number per Irish House	.	4.75	5.6
	Average number per House	.	4.3	4.6
	% of all Irish	.	44%	39.4 %
	Number of other Irish	.	39	68
	% of Irish-born	.	18.5 %	17 %
	Number of Irish-born	.	28	51
	Total Street Population	.	151	302
1871	Average number per Irish House	.	3.1	4.7
	Average number per House	.	4.4	4.4
	% of all Irish	.	42.5 %	26 %
	Number of other Irish	.	36	42
	% of Irish-born	.	17 %	13.8 %
	Number of Irish-born	.	24	47
	Total Street Population	.	141	340
1861	Average number per Irish House	.	.	4.5
	Average number per House	.	.	4.6
	% of all Irish	.	.	35.6 %
	Number of other Irish	.	.	94
	% of Irish-born	.	.	16.6 %
	Number of Irish-born	.	.	82
	Total Street Population	.	.	493
1851	Average number per Irish House	4.6	6.6	7.0
	Average number per House	4.1	5.6	4.6
	% of all Irish	84 %	35 %	13.6 %
	Number of other Irish	12	43	20
	% of Irish-born	73 %	34 %	8%
	Number of Irish-born	82	40	29
	Total Street Population	112	118	359
	Bulleys Yard			
	Henffordd			
	Milford Street			

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

## HOLYWELL: LOCATION AND OCCUPANCY

The identification of Irish locales in Holywell has its difficulties. The areas where the Irish lived were more dispersed than in Wrexham and Mold, while the town's street plans (of one area in particular) changed appreciably over the period, making comparisons difficult. Two main areas of Irish habitation have been identified: that to the north-east of the main town, near the Catholic shrine of St Winifred, consisting of Well Street, New Road, Mount Zion, Castle Hill, Chapel Street, Greenfield Street, Whitford Street, Cross Street and Pen-y-ball Street. The second area was at the southern end of the High Street, to the south-west of the main town, but with some smaller associated areas located in yards and courts behind the High Street facades. This area consisted of Primrose Hill, Brynford Street, Summer Hill, School Place, Bagillt Road, Coleshill Street, Panton Place, Swan Court, Bank Court, Blue Bell Yard, plus two outliers called Garth-y-Foel and Tai Cochion.

In 1851, there were 74 Irish in the first area out of a population of 1,790, or 4.1%; in the second area, there were 165 Irish out of a population of 2,517, or 6.5%. This meant that of Holywell Town's total population of 4,307, some 239 Irish represented 5.5%. However, these numbers consisted of more than Irish-born residents, together with their families, but included Irish-born lodgers and their dependants. Thus, Area 1 had 27 Irish-born (1.5%) with twelve family members, making 2.2% of the area's population, plus Irish-born lodgers and their families numbering 35; in all, 74 Irish. Area 2 had 76 Irish-born and their families (3.1%), together with 54 lodgers (2.1%): in all, 165 Irish. In Area 1, the Irish lived 6.1 persons to a house, while in Area 2, which had almost four times as many lodgers, the occupancy rate was greater, at 11.1 per house.

The census returns for Holywell in 1861 were unreliable. The demarcation of streets was unclear, data were omitted, or incorrect, so that columns were left incomplete and entries confused. Accurate comparison with other years is therefore not viable. From the data available it appears that Area 1 had 69 Irish out of a total population of 1,832, or 3.7%, and Area 2 had 24 Irish out of 610, or 3.9%. Together, these Irish, 93 in number, represented 3.8% of Holywell's total population. It would seem that the Irish population of Area 1 had decreased over the decade since 1851 by five, or 0.4%. Area 2, on the other hand, had lost 141 Irish since the previous census. According to these figures, 1861 was the year with the lowest percentage of Irish in the town, although 1881 was to have the lowest number, 87. Between 1861 and 1881, Holywell was to experience an increase in Irish numbers which took its Irish population to within twenty-two of its 1851 total. It must, however, be borne in mind that the census returns for 1861 were not a sound basis for valid conclusions or comparisons.

Similar caution must be exercised in calculating house occupancy. Over the town as a whole, Irish houses were each on average occupied by four people, but in certain parts this rate was higher - Blue Bell Yard, for instance, where 22 shared five houses. Exceptionally, in Garth-y-Foel, there were nine Irish occupants in one house. 1861, therefore, saw an appreciable fall in the Irish presence in Holywell, but whether this was due to a genuine decline or to faulty census enumeration is an unresolved issue.

1871 saw a rise in Irish numbers, particularly so in Area 1 where they reached their highest point of the period, 147, or 7.25%. Area 2 also experienced a rise to 70 Irish, or 7%. Combined, these two areas gave Holywell Town a total Irish

population of 217, or 7.1 %, its highest percentage of the thirty years under review. In Area 1 there were 27 Irish houses and, in Area 2, 14 Irish houses. The first area thus had an occupancy of 5.4 per Irish house, while the second area had five. The average number in the houses of Area 1 was 4.4 per house and, in Area 2, four per house. Irish houses had a slightly higher rate of occupancy than the norm. (Note: of the 808 houses in these two areas, 93 were not occupied, or 11.5%).

By 1881, the number of Irish had fallen once more, in Area 1 to their lowest point of 29 and, in Area 2, to their second lowest of 58. In Area 1, the Irish formed but 2% of the population, but in Area 2, 13%. The house occupancy of the Irish in Area 1 was 3.6 per house and 6.4 in Area 2. These numbers were lower than the average for the streets in Area 1 but higher than those in Area 2.

## FLINT: LOCATION AND OCCUPANCY

There were sixteen Irish-born enumerated in the town of Flint on the night of 30/31 March 1851, that is, 0.5% of the population of 3,296. However, in the rectilinear centre area of the town, where these Irish-born lived, they represented 0.8% of their district population of 2,048. Furthermore, the Irish-born who precisely fitted W.J.Lowe's Widnes Factor definition of 'effectively-Irish' numbered only five. Despite these qualifications, the number of Irish in Flint - the Irish-born and those culturally associated-was thirty-nine. The time of significance for the Irish in the population of the town was yet to come. Though few in number, the thirty-nine are worth a closer look. The first feature to note is that fourteen of them, or 35%, were to be found in Roskell's Square and twelve of them, or 31%, were living in Parish Lane. The others were distributed about the forty acres which the town occupied. There were no Irish enclaves - they were to appear later in the century as the town grew - but the beginnings of Irish areas were to be discerned.

By 7/8 April 1861, all the sixteen Irish-born enumerated in the census had left Flint to be replaced by 59 newcomers. These formed 1.7% of the town's population of 3,428. With the increased numbers, the early signs of Irish 'clustering' discernible in 1851 were more clearly to be seen. Adding the numbers of Irish-born to those of the effectively - Irish, one can see that Swan Lane's population of 159 included 28 Irish, that is 17%. Johnson Street, although with smaller numbers, had 75% Irish. The town centre itself formed a potential area of 'Irishness', 57 Irish out of a population of 631 equalling 9%. However, Mount Pleasant possessed the most apparent Irish cluster with 68 Irish in its population of 147 (46%). This area was some three-quarters of a mile from the nucleus of the town, a fact that could have contributed to any perception of the Irish as a people huddled apart. (See TABLE 25)

*Table 25: Irish settlement in specific streets and districts of Flint, 1861.*

Street/Area	Irish-born	Irish-influenced	Street Total	% Irish-born	% All Irish
Johnson St.	5	13	24	21	75
Swan Lane	12	16	159	7.5	18
Trelawney Sq.	1	-	23	4	4
Sidney St.	3	2	110	3	5
Mumforth St.	2	-	115	2	2
Chester St.	3	-	200	1.5	1.5
Totals	26	31	631	4	9
Mount Pleasant	24	44	147	16	46
TOTALS	50	75	778	6	16

*Source:* Census Enumerators' Returns, 1861.

Such a perception could have been strengthened by the level of occupancy in Irish households in Mount Pleasant. In the town centre, the average occupancy of Irish houses ranged from three per household in Chester Street to six in Johnson Street, giving an average of 4.5. By comparison, Mount Pleasant's 68 Irish inhabitants were in eight households, yielding an average occupancy of 8.5. Six households were below this average and two above, with ten and eleven inhabitants respectively.

In 1871, the census revealed an Irish-born community of 251, which represented 6% of Flint's population of 4,269. Added to these, 235 other Irish gave an Irish community of 486, or 11%. This figure was significantly higher than those of previous counts. However, these Irish were not, by any means, all 'settlers' for 41 of those present in 1861 had departed by 1871, leaving only 18 to be joined by 233 newcomers.



Mount Pleasant had lost its earlier eminence as an Irish enclave, its 10% Irish having been overtaken in rank by 61% in Johnson Street, by 58% in Duck Lane and by 57% in Castle Dyke. The Chester-Holyhead railway had divided the town into a mainly residential section and a developing industrial section and it was in the latter part that the Irish quarter had grown. Here lived 58% of Flint's Irish population. They numbered 283 and represented 39% of the population of that part of the town, compared with the 10% which the other 203 Irish represented in theirs. Greater, too, were the percentages of Irish in their individual streets - ranging from 46% to 61% - than they were in the older part of the town, where they varied from 8% to 30%. Flint to the estuary side of the railway was acquiring a distinct Irish flavour, 'recognisable', to anyone seeking confirmation, in the number of people who lived in so-called Irish houses: 6.1 compared to 5.4 in other parts of the town. In individual streets, also, the occupancy per Irish house ranged from 2.6 to 7 in 'old' Flint to 3.3 to 7.5 in the newer, more Irish part. Commercial Road near the chemical works had 7.3 in its Irish houses and an average of 5.7 in all its houses, Castle Street 7.5 compared with 5.8 and Duck Lane 5.5 as against 4.2. In the other part of the town, Feather Street had 6.5 in its Irish houses or 1.7 more than its overall average and in Duke Street the similar difference was 2.4. However, in five of the area's nine streets the average occupancy was greater than that of the Irish houses. Flint's Irish were moving to the other side of the tracks.

In April 1881 the population of Flint was 5,096, including 308 Irish-born. Sixty-two Irish had stayed on from 1871 - three from 1861 - and had been augmented by 246 new arrivals. South-west of the railway, in the larger part of the town, the Irish of 1871 seemed to have thinned out in number and in street percentage. Mumforth Street had only four Irish, or 2%, and Chapel Street seven, or 6%, but the

range of the other streets with more Irish went from 11% to 16%. On the other side of the railway, the number of Irish was more than double, 217 compared to 106, and the street percentage ranged from 24% to 54%. However, the Evans Street and Castle Terrace Irish reduced this overall figure with their total of only sixteen as opposed to the 201 of the other streets, or an average of 17% against 41%. Such a difference could suggest that, at least for 1881, streets rather than areas were becoming increasingly Irish. Of the six separate streets to the north-east of the railway, four contained 93% of the area's Irish, that is, Duck Lane (33%), Castle View (54%), Castle Street (28%) and Roskell Square (50%). Mount Pleasant, set apart from the town, kept its Irish flavour, 22%, and a new cluster had appeared along the Chester Road to the south-east, Princess Street and Queen Street. Here, of its 244 population, 48 were Irish-born and 15 Irish-influenced, 63 in all, or 26%. In all, 308 Irish-born equalled 6% of Flint's total population of 5,096 but in the main or central part of the town, where the great majority of the Irish lived, the percentage was 9%. (Three hundred and one Irish-born out of 3,335 population). All Irish in this central area numbered 521, or 16%. Over thirty years, the total Irish component of the town's population had risen 1.2% in 1851 to 10% in 1881. This growth was to continue so that, by 1886, the *Chester Chronicle* could comment on the occasion of Michael Davitt's visit, that Flint was 'somewhat of an Irish colony in Wales'.<sup>149</sup>

The numbers of people in Irish houses varied according to location. Mount Pleasant, still apart from the town, had an average of six Irish per house, as did Church Street one of the towns main axes. Feather Street and Mount Street, adjacent thoroughfares parallel to each other and to Church Street, had an average of eight

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<sup>149</sup> *Chester Chronicle*, 13 Feb 1886, editorial.

per house. These averages contrasted with that for all houses in this part of town, 4.8. Swan Lane and Sydney Street, in the south-west, had averages of seven and 5.4 in their Irish houses. In the most recent cluster, Queen and Princess Streets, the average was seven. On the other side of the railway, the average ranged from 3.8 in Duck Lane to eight in Castle Street. Roskell Square had 7.2 and Johnson Street 7.25. The difference in house occupancy in this 'poorer' area was not so marked as it was in the main part of the town. In the more established section, the average for all houses was 4.8 per house and for Irish houses, seven; in the newer area, 5.2 compared with 6.8. a difference of 2.2 as against 1.6. This could have been due to the higher average age of the Irish in the older part and a greater number of grandchildren per house.

## MICROCOSMS - A STREET AND A FAMILY IN WREXHAM

To this point in the investigation into the presence and experience of the Irish in North-East Wales, the approach has been thematic, with findings given under such headings as Demographic Structure, Settlement and so on. This approach has its dangers: it can impose a taxonomic burden upon its subject and can lose sight of the whole. Themes are for demographers; people do not live in them. The Irish in, say, Holywell would not necessarily have felt an affinity with the Irish in Wrexham. Their families and streets were what mattered to them, not their membership of a larger Irish population. To counter any artificiality brought about by a thematic treatment, it is proposed to look now at two microcosms - first, of a street and, secondly, of a family - and to take a synoptic view of small groups of Irish to balance the analytic approach hitherto applied. There is, of course, a paradox here in that a small-scale study can give a holistic view whereas a large-scale thematic study selects only common constituents. But the study of a microcosm is a kind of 'atomic' history; it examines the quantum underlying the sweep of narrative and interpretative theory. Its sharper focus can reveal such dynamics of a community as, for example, the relationship between the inhabitants of a street or the interplay between members of a family. Furthermore, it can confirm, deny or modify the assertions made in a generalised account and, by concentrating on detail, can demonstrate the variety of experience sometimes lost in a broad-brush picture.

## THE WREXHAM IRISH IN MICROCOSM: MOUNT STREET

The Irish in Wrexham, from 1851 to 1881, never existed in numbers or density sufficient to constitute a ghetto. Such an assertion recalls the debate, outlined in Chapter 1, on the degree of assimilation achieved by the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain. This debate is characterised by a diversity of interpretation ranging from an insistence upon complete Irish segregation to its denial. Between these poles of opinion lie the concepts of clusters of Irish in limited employment and unique demographic patterns and of Irish networks enmeshed with other social networks - of the poor, of the church, of cultural association. And without doubt, the debate concerning the Irish ghetto has been coloured by a concentration upon the experience of the migrants in large urban areas during the early and mid-Victorian periods. In Liverpool and Manchester, say, in 1851, it may have been possible to identify areas of complete Irish domination, but in Wrexham it would have been difficult because the town's Irish were by no means locked away from other townspeople nor were they segregated from other Irish in their streets and courtyards.

Wrexham was never so large that one part seemed remote from another; a few minutes walk would suffice to cross it. Nevertheless, Irish areas were identifiable and, indeed, referred to as such. Houses in Pentrefelin, for example, were described in one governmental report as "low, damp.....without privies, and the people chiefly Irish."<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Second Report of the Health of Towns' Commission, P.P. (1845), Vol. 1, p.217.

Several areas of old Wrexham were low, damp and without privies but the nationality of their inhabitants was never invoked. However, given that the Irish were perceived as separate, such perception must be acknowledged: they tended to live not in ghettos but in clusters; and with other poor. A closer look at one of the clusters may be revealing and, having considered the extent and pattern of Irish settlement in the town as a whole, it could be advantageous to focus more narrowly and ask what the experience of the Irish was in a particular Wrexham street, between 1851 and 1881.

Case studies based on small towns can provide a different perspective from that given by those based on large cities and such issues as in - and out - migration and the changing nature of migrant settlement over time can be more precisely examined and easily managed with smaller numbers. It could be lacking in proportion to find significance in the fortunes of a single street or family drawn from among the thousands of, say, Manchester Irish; from the few hundreds of Wrexham Irish it could be entirely appropriate. It is a matter of scale, with the size of the study reflecting the size of the subject. Furthermore, the labour markets and social organisations in small towns do not necessarily echo the generalised patterns of their region as a whole: for instance, the Wrexham area coal mines drew their workforce chiefly from the villages of the locality with Wrexham town itself providing but few miners. It would be misleading therefore to generalise about the economic structure of the area: two micro-studies would be required, one of the town, another of the villages. Again, a study of say, chain migration within one family may reveal distinctive, even unique, features which could call in question received opinion on the phenomenon. For example, the average age of chain migrants to small provincial towns could be significantly higher than that of their compatriots in large

conurbations or ports of entry; their economic status too could be found to be healthier. Such findings would not invalidate any all-embracing generalisations but could fine-tune them. This point is made in John Herson's study of families in nineteenth-century Stafford. Over-reliance on official sources of information such as census returns can lead to oversimplification and important detail can lie hidden under generalisation about the majority. In the case of Victorian Stafford, '..... the superficial picture of mobility and instability derived from a simple head count of individuals in fact hides a substantial core of family stability'<sup>151</sup>

Mount Street from 1851 to 1881 has been chosen for a micro-study because this part of Wrexham demonstrated gradual changes in the composition and nature of an Irish microcosm within a provincial town. The numbers involved were large enough to provide a valid sample and the percentages of Irish-born remained steady enough between thirteen and seventeen percent to eliminate any aberrant population surge. (Tuttle Street, on the other hand, ranged between six percent and ninety-three percent, making it untypical of the Irish experience in Wrexham's streets in the second half of the nineteenth century). Mount Street - and, later, neighbouring Yorke Street - is also worthy of detailed study because of the distinctive character of some its inhabitants.

A word of caution, however. The censuses were conducted in the March/April period, a time which coincided with an annual fair which began on 23rd March and ran for fourteen days. Many whose specific and short-term business was with the fair - strolling players, street musicians and the like - would therefore be present in the town and could distort the census enumeration. Distinction must also

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<sup>151</sup> J. Herson in Swift and Gilley (eds.), *The Local Dimension, etc.* (1999), p. 6.

be made between permanent and temporary residents. Many of the temporary hawkers and peddlers were Irish and, with the numbers of Irish-born in Wrexham being comparatively small (308 in a total population of 6,714 in 1851), an influx of transients could inflate the percentage disproportionately.

In 1851, Mount Street had 374 occupants on the night of the census. Of these, fifty-three were permanent residents Irish-born and ninety-one effectively-Irish or Irish influenced, that is, not Irish-born but members of Irish families. The fifty-three represented almost fourteen percent of Mount Street's population,. but if the ninety-one are added the percentage rose to 38.5% (See FIGURE 5). This last point owes something to W.J.Lowe's Widnes Factor for calculating the 'realistic' (or reliable) number of Irish in a small town: that is, - to remind the reader - a household is counted as Irish only if a minimum of two of its members, including the household head were Irish-born.

An examination of particular households may help to enlarge upon this. Number 1, Mount Street in 1851 had a total occupancy of thirty-two people, only seven of whom were permanent residents:

Patrick Marran	Head	50 years	Hawker of trinkets	Born, Ireland
Margaret Marran	Wife	38 years	Hawker of confectionery	Born, Ireland
John Marran	Son	18 years	Dyer	Born, Manchester
Peter Marran	Unmarried	10 years	Scholar	Born, Wrexham
Paterick Marran	Son	7 years	Scholar	Born, Oswestry
Thomas Marran	Son	2 years	---	Born, Wrexham
Ellen McGuire	Unmarried	20 years	Servants	Born, Ireland

It is true that only three of the seven permanent residents were Irish-born - 43% of the household - but the strength of the Irish influence may be assumed to



have been great. This would have been so where the mother was Irish-born but especially so where both parents were from Ireland: Irish by birth and upbringing. Number is not the only element in determining the nature and vigour of a culture. The remainder of the occupants of Number 1 - indeed, the majority - were designated as 'temporary lodgers'. Of these twenty-five transients, nine were Irish-born, or 36%. They were described as hawkers of fruits (13), confectioners (2), itinerant musician (1), peddler in small wares (1), housemaids (2), collier (1), baker (1), dealer in pictures (1), with three unclassified. Eight of the fourteen hawkers and peddlers were Irish-born; none with a trade was born in Ireland.

Number 4, Mount Street, had twenty-two occupants, only four family members plus a servant being permanent. These were Irish-born Patrick McDermott, a thirty-two year old marine store dealer, and his twenty-eight year old wife, also born in Ireland, together with their two small daughters, two years and six months old, both Wrexham born. Their unmarried nineteen year old servant girl was Irish-born. The other occupants, seventeen in number, originated variously in the East Indies, Merseyside, Stockport, Yorkshire, Shrewsbury, Ruabon and Wrexham itself. Seven of the temporary residents came from Ireland. Unlike the previous household, Number 4 did not have a contingent obviously connected with the fair. The boarders included a brewer, a housepainter, two cutlers (probably scissors-grinders), a sailor, a barber, a collier and a railway worker. On census night, the Irish-born element equalled 45% of the occupants, but the McDermott family itself - Patrick, Ann and their two daughters, together with Bridget Thomas, their servant - was 60% Irish-born and 40% Irish-influenced. This is the family to be the subject of closer study.

By contrast, Numbers 5 to 18 inclusive contained no Irish-born among their sixty-five inhabitants. Number 5 had fifteen occupants - a civil engineer from Southwark with his family of ten and their servants - but the remaining nineteen households had an average membership of 3.4. Here may be a suggestion of the notion that like attracts like and that where no Irish were, no Irish came. In Number 23 we find the first articulated distinction between permanent and temporary lodgers and also the first mention of 'strolling players', in a list of six, four of whom were Irish-born. Number 24 had a seventy percent Irish-born constituency but if the twenty-year old shoemaker head's two infant sons, both Wrexham-born, are included, there was a ninety percent Irish-influenced household of ten people. Similarly, Number 25 was a seventy-three percent Irish household, comprising eight permanent and three temporary members. Number 27 had no Irish-born but with Number 28 we have a one hundred percent Irish establishment. A rag dealer, Patrick Vaughan, forty-two years old, his fifty year old wife and their four children, lived with ten permanent lodgers. All in the house were Irish. Numbers 29 to 34 had no Irish-born among their forty-seven inhabitants while in Number 35 only one of the fourteen was not Irish-born; and he hailed from Liverpool. This meant that Number 35 had a ninety-three percent- perhaps even 100% - Irish occupation; furthermore, of rag dealers and hawkers. For the rest, twenty-six Mount Street houses held only three Irish-born among their one hundred and sixteen people so that, in all, there were ten Irish households out of the sixty-one in the street. Most of the Irish houses however had a significantly denser occupancy than their neighbours, nine having one hundred and thirty people out of the street's total of 347, or 35% This average of 14.5 per house declined over the period studied, that is, from 14.4 in 1851 to 5.6 in 1861 and 4.2 in 1871; thereafter the average increased to 6.25 in 1881. (See FIGURE 7)

Ten years later, on census night, 7th April 1861, Mount Street had 427 people, an increase of fifty-three over the 1851 (SEE FIGURE 6). There were twenty-one Irish households in the street out of a total of ninety-three, or 22.5% which was 6.5% higher than the percentage for 1851. The average density per household had fallen between 1851 and 1861 from 6.1 to 4.6 but the average density of Irish households in 1861 was 5.6. (See FIGURE 7)

Numbers and percentages of Irish-born and Non-Irish in Mount Street, Wrexham, 1851 and 1861.

FIGURE 5

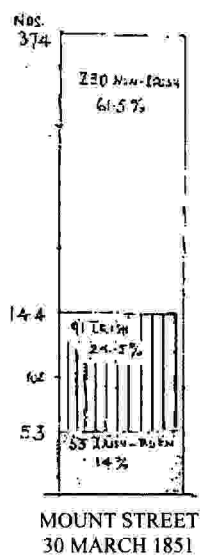
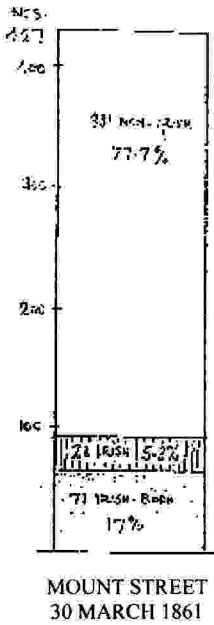
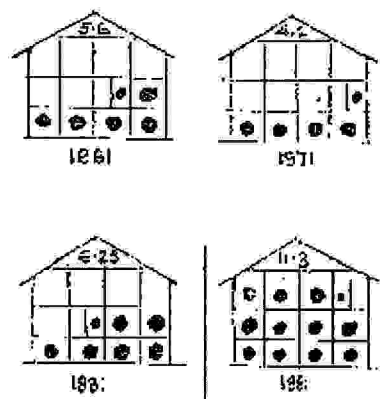


FIGURE 6



Average density of 'Irish' households in Mount Street, Wrexham, 1861 – 1881, and average density of all Mount Street households, 1881.

FIGURE 7

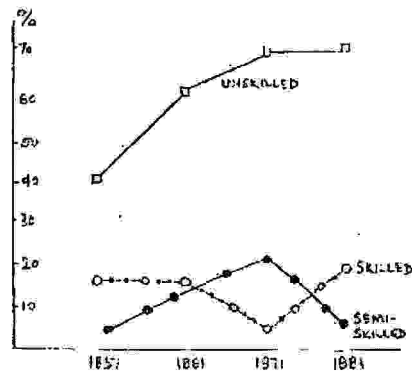


Source: Census Enumerations' Returns, 1851 – 1861.

Source: Census Enumerations' Returns, 1851 – 1861.

Occupations of the population of Mount Street, Wrexham, 1851 – 1881, shown by percentage of total street population in W. A. Armstrong's occupational classifications.

FIGURE 8



Source: Census Enumerations' Returns, 1851 – 1861.

Large-scale occupancy in Mount Street had diminished by 1861. Totals per house such as fifteen, twenty-two and thirty-two had been replaced by seven, nine, eleven and, in one case only, fifteen. There were no Irish recorded in seventy-two houses and a total of seventy-three Irish-born was recorded on the night of the census, that is, 17%. However, if the other twenty-three Irish-influenced entries are included this percentage rose to 22.3%. The 17% Irish-born is higher than 1851's figure of 14% but the 22.3% Irish community is considerably lower than the 38.5% for the decade earlier. 1851 had seen only one household in the street with 100% Irish-born occupancy whereas in 1861 there were fourteen such households, although with smaller numbers, for example, five, seven, ten and fifteen.

The census enumerators recorded forty-three 'strangers' and two on recruiting service in Wrexham but there appeared to be fewer hawkers and street sellers in evidence in Mount Street lodgings than there had been in 1851, lodgings which were, after all, some of the nearest and most convenient for the main venue of the annual fair, the Eagles Meadow. There were five recorded hawkers as against thirty-two in 1851. In Number 19, however, there were two 'comedians' from Limerick, a Charles and Sophia Browning, married, twenty and seventeen years old. For the rest there were such trades represented as skinner, dressmaker, blacksmith, shoemaker, stay-maker, painter, all featuring significantly among the labourers, coal carriers, etc. There was even a 'professor of music and dancing' in Number 94 and the three sons of Margaret Warren, a seventy-seven year old widowed lodging-house keeper, aspired to being a hairdresser, a printer and a gilder. A hint of upward social mobility in Mount Street perhaps?

A classification by occupation of the Irish-born men in the street reveals that of the forty-five, eighteen fell into the skilled category, seventeen into the semi-skilled category and ten into the unskilled. Allowance must be made, of course, for self-inflation of status. When the Irish male contingent in the street is taken as a whole, that is, Irish-born plus Irish-influenced, one sees percentages such as: skilled 18%, semi-skilled 17% and unskilled 62%. In 1851, the equivalent percentages for Mount Street were 18%, 50% and 42% (See FIGURE 8) As in 1851, the majority of entries in the 'Place of Origin' columns was given as 'Ireland', but Galway was named in thirty-one cases, Roscommon in fourteen and Mayo in seven. One man came from Sligo, and six from Dublin. In short, Connacht continued to supply Wrexham with the majority of its Irish. There were, however, two major differences between the 1851 and 1861 'Place of Origin' entries: in 1851, the largest single number, thirty-one, had come from Mayo whereas, in 1861, it was Galway which provided thirty-one; furthermore, in 1861, Cavan appeared for the first time as a provider, albeit a minor one with four migrants. Number 4, Mount Street, occupied by the McDermott household had, by 1861, unburdened itself of its seventeen 1851 temporary lodgers. Increasing prosperity, as much as an increase in family size, was probably the reason for this. The children had increased to five, three sons aged from two years to eight and two daughters, aged one month and three years. Two nephews had arrived to live and work with the household head, Patrick, in his marine stores and a sixteen year old Irish-born servant girl was listed. There were, in all, ten in the household, four of whom were born in Ireland. From the census we learn that Patrick McDermott and his wife came from Galway; in 1851, their origin had been given simply as 'Ireland'.

On the night of the 1871 census, 2nd to 3rd April, there were 537 people in Mount Street and a small entry leading off it, Eagle Street. There were eighty-one Irish-born listed, giving a percentage of 15%; or, with other Irish, one hundred and four, giving 19% Irish. This shows a halving of the percentage Irish presence since 1851, from 38.5%, through 22.5% in 1861 to 19% in 1871. However, 1871 was the year of the highest number of Irish-born in Mount Street. The average density of Irish households had fallen from 5.6 in 1861 to 4.2 in 1871 (FIGURE 7). The highest occupancy, at Number 26, was nineteen, consisting of a lodging-house keeper and peddler, forty-nine years, and his wife, forty-eight years, plus their six children, aged nine to sixteen, together with eleven lodgers, none of whom was Irish-born. Number 12 had its labourer head, thirty-one years, with his thirty year old wife and their five children, six months to ten years, with three lodgers, a hawker and an agricultural labourer and a third, aged seven, whose birthplace was not known. Of the occupations given were twenty-eight labourers, seven hawkers, five lodging-house keepers, two publicans, one beggar, one bellhanger, one ironworker, one postboy, one servant and an Ordnance Survey surveyor, forty-eight year old from Ireland. The solitary beggar, in Number 16, was an Irishman blinded by a gas explosion; the bellhanger, in Number 43, was an Irish-born lodger who may have been working in St Giles Parish Church a few yards away, or in St Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Regent Street whose bell had been installed in 1864.<sup>152</sup> Taking the fifty Irish men shown with occupations and classifying them according to Armstrong's occupational groups, we find that 2% were in intermediate occupations, 4% in skilled and 24% in semi-skilled trades, with the majority, 72% in unskilled

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<sup>152</sup> A.H.Dodd, (ed.) *A History of Wrexham*, (Wrexham), 1989, p. 170.

occupations. (See FIGURE 8) Unfortunately, we are denied such detailed information when it comes to 'Place of Origin' for the enumerators in 1871 were not so assiduous as those ten years earlier, 'Ireland', being the most precise information to be entered. Their colleagues in other parts of the town were more conscientious.

On the night of 3rd to 4th April 1881, five hundred and thirty-seven people were enumerated in Mount Street and its enclaves, Brown's Court, Jones Square, Alcock's Court, Turner's Court and Old Church Hill. There were sixty-eight Irish-born, or 13%, together with one hundred and four Irish-influenced people, 19%. The Irish community therefore numbered one hundred and seventy-two, or 32% of Mount Street inhabitants. There had been a declining Irish presence in the street since 1851 but 1871 to 1881 shows an arresting of this tendency: from a high point of 38% in 1851, through 22% to a low point of 19% in 1871 followed by an increase to 32% in 1881. This increase was not due to the inclusion of Mount Street's enclaves in the count because they had been incorporated into the street in 1871. Nor was it due to a fresh wave of migrants for there was a net decrease of in-migration 1871 to 1881. An increase in the birth rate between censuses is the most probable reason.

The total population of Mount Street at five hundred and thirty-seven reached its highest number in the 1851 - 1881 period and, along with this, the average density of its households rose to 11.3. At 6.25, the average density of Irish households was less than half the street's average, a fact which at the time could no doubt have occasioned some incredulity. (FIGURE 7) Doubters could have pointed to Number 9 with its fifteen occupants. Ann Lynch, a forty-one year old Irish-born widow, lived there with her three daughters and two sons, all Wrexham-born, together with nine boarders; Number 9 was a lodging-house and hardly a typical Irish household.



Most of the Irish-born were labourers but others were dealers, miners, makers of such things as umbrellas and shoes. There was also a carver and gilder, a licensed victualler, a groom and a fishmonger. According to Armstrong's classification of occupations, there were 20% who were skilled, 7% semiskilled and 73% unskilled. The greatest changes since 1871 had occurred in the skilled and semi-skilled groups. In 1871, only 4% of Irish males were skilled; by 1881 this had risen to 20%. The reverse was the case in the semi-skilled group, a decrease from 24% in 1871 to 7% ten years later. (FIGURE 8) 1871 and 1881 were the years when there was the greatest coincidence between the occupational classifications of Irish males in Mount Street and in Wrexham as a whole. In 1871, the semi - and unskilled groups in Mount Street represented 24% and 72% respectively; in Wrexham as a whole the corresponding figures were 23% and 73%. By 1881, the situation had changed and read: skilled 20% and unskilled 73%, compared with Wrexham's general figures of 19% and 72%. In 1861, there had been very little coincidence with a higher percentage of skilled men living in Mount Street than in the town generally (18%;6%). It would seem therefore that, at least in this respect and in the second half of the period under scrutiny, Mount Street was not untypical of a street in Wrexham, perhaps an indication that integration was taking place. Nevertheless, Irish mobility was continuing. Seventeen Irish households formed 30% of the total number of fifty-seven in Mount Street. Of these, five households had been in the street in 1871, which means that 70% of the street's Irish had moved on. Two other households listed in 1871 were, in 1881, to be found in other streets in the town. The average of the Irish-born householders and their spouses was 45 years, perhaps another sign that the Irish were beginning to settle down as the century progressed.

Of those registered in the 1871 census, Irish-born Thomas O'Brien, 38 year old and a labourer, was listed at Number 1, Mount Street, together with his 48 year old wife, Mary. By 1881 they had six children, three of each sex, the eldest son being a tailor. A John Flanagan of Number 3 - in 1871 lodging next door with his brother-in-law, Philip Farley - was a warehouse labourer and 34 years old; Flanagan and his wife, 32 years, had three children and four lodgers so that on census night their Irish-born element made up 44% of their total occupancy. At Number 4 lived another who had been enumerated in 1871 - Patrick Mulrooney, his wife and eleven year old son, plus an Irish-born labourer lodger, while at 21, Brown's Court was Michael McLoughlin, a 38 year old licensed victualler and his 37 year old wife. John Herrington, who in 1871 had been listed as a widowed post boy living with his one year old daughter and his widowed mother, was in 1881 to be found in Old Church Hill with a 42 year old wife he had married since the previous census. He now had five children, his widowed mother, and was no longer a postboy but a labourer.

For purposes of comparison with Mount Street, we turn now - briefly - to Bulleys Yard and adjacent streets in Mold.

The overall percentage of the Irish-born in Mold (2.4%) was much exceeded by their local concentrations. For instance, in 1851, Bulleys Yard contained 73.2% Irish-born while Milford Street and Henffordd had 14.4%. By 1861, Milford Street had 16.6% by 1871, 13.8% and by 1881, 16.8%. These three streets were close together in a constricted area between the parish church and the castle hill. The Irish in other parts of Mold were few so that the term 'cluster' may rightly be used to describe this enclave.

In 1851, Bulleys Yard had 82 Irish-born out of its total population of 112, including permanent residents and their families, plus lodgers and their families. There appeared to be no temporary residents such as were found in Wrexham at the time of the annual fair. The Yard's 82 Irish-born were distributed throughout twenty households, giving an average household membership of 4.1, or slightly fewer than the average household membership for the Yard of 4.6. Four remaining, non-Irish, households contained on average 4.25, that is, more than their Irish neighbours in the Yard. Furthermore, fourteen of the non-Irish lived in three adjacent houses, forming a cluster of their own. The average age of the Yard's Irish-born males was 33 years and of the females 29 years, while the average age of the male heads of households was 32 years and of the female heads, 37 years (including two widows). In the Yard, there lived five artisans or semi-skilled workers, five lodging house keepers, four paupers and one dealer. The majority, however, were agricultural and general labourers. Of the 56 Irish-born workers, 23 were agricultural labourers (92% of the Yard's employed) and 19 hawkers (90%). The lodging-house keepers, the paupers and the dealer were all Irish-born. Although the numbers were too small to permit valid generalisations, it is worth noting that the 40% Irish-born artisan group

approximated to the percentage for the town as a whole: Bulleys Yard was not totally an enclave of unskilled toilers, hawkers and paupers. (TABLE 26)

By 1861, Bulleys Yard had disappeared as a separate census entry, leaving Milford Street and Henffordd as the town's two discrete Irish areas. In this year, Milford Street had 82 Irish out of a total of 493, or 16%, while Henffordd's Irish represented 35% of its total population in 1851, a percentage which had declined to 25.5% in 1871. By 1881, Milford Street's Irish represented 22.5% of the total population.

TABLE 26: The ages, occupations and origins of the Irish population of Bulleys yard, Mold, 1851.

Average age of Irish-born: Male 33 years; female 29 years.						
Average age of Irish-born heads of household: Male 32 years; Female 37 years.						
Occupations:						
<u>All (Irish-born and Others)</u>						
Artisans/Semi-skilled	Agric. Labs	Gen. Labs./Unskilled	Hawkers	Lodging – House Keeper	Dealers	Paupers
5	25	3	21	5	1	4

<u>Irish-born</u>						
2 (40%)	23 (92%)	2 (66%)	19 (90%)	5 (100%)	1 (100%)	4 (100%)

<u>Born in Flintshire and elsewhere:</u>						
3	2	1	2	-	-	-

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851.

## SURNAMES IN BULLEYS YARD, 1851

The place of origin in Ireland was not recorded in the census of 1851 so that it is impossible to identify the places whence the Irish in Bulleys Yard came. However, John Herson in his study of the Stafford Irish<sup>153</sup> has plotted provincial origins with 'reasonable confidence' by the use of surnames, census evidence and church records. Matching Herson's list of surnames to those Irish-born in Bulleys Yard in 1851, one finds the majority associated with Connacht, one with Leinster and one with Munster. These were such names as Burke, Connor, Durkin, Kelly, Mahon, McCann, while those of 'uncertain origin' such as Farrell, Kenny and Ruhall were also found in the Yard. This is a hint - and no more - that the Irish in Bulleys Yard were from the same part of Ireland as most of their compatriots in North-East Wales, that is, Connacht.

The focus narrows now to a single family, the key social institution influencing peoples' lives.

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153 J. Herson in Swift and Gilley (eds.), *The Local Dimension* (1999), Appendix 1.

THE McDERMOTT FAMILY OF MOUNT STREET AND YORKE  
STREET, 1851 - 1881

The mass of Irish immigrants to nineteenth-century Britain seemed just that - a mass, cohering by virtue of its poverty, nationality, ethnicity and religion. In the larger towns, their number and society's attitude fostered a stereotype. In the smaller towns, however, perspectives could be different: streets, families, individuals did not always fit the stereotype. So it was with the McDermotts. They were not poor in the comprehensive, almost cosmic, Irish migrant sense; they bettered themselves as the century wore on; they were not noticeably nationalist or ethnic Irish and, although Roman Catholic, were not evangelically so. As immigrants they were not typical. And therein lies their interest in a study of this kind. The Irish were not homogeneously poor or without hope, they were not in hermetic isolation because of a feverish religion or nationalism; furthermore, the nature of their immigrant lives changed with time. To follow the fortunes of one family, the McDermotts of Wrexham, is to discover the nature and extent of this change. As their generations followed each other, one can detect shifts in the family's economic and social status parallel with the changes in the fortunes of the town. The mass of Irish immigrants has received ample scrutiny; it may now be appropriate to look at a few. The historiography of the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain - fixated perhaps by the life and times of the 'Little Irelands' of large towns - lacks due consideration of such issues as social mobility and family history. The Irish were no more locked in time than any other section of nineteenth-century Britain and their 'Little Irelands' gradually disappeared. Where did they re-settle and how far did they remain in the same social echelon? The McDermotts of Wrexham may help to provide an insight into these questions.

In the 1851 census, Patrick McDermott and his wife, Ann, were located in Mount Street, with their two children, Mary Ann, aged two years and Catharine, aged six months. In fact, the McDermotts also had two sons, Michael born in August 1846 and James born in October 1847. The records of St Mary's Cathedral in Wrexham show that Patrick married Ann, nee Keigan or Keoghan, on 20 October 1845, and although the 1857 census did not disclose where in Ireland they were born or from which part of Britain they had reached Wrexham, it can be seen that they were not 'Famine Irish' and that they married when Patrick was 24 years and Ann, 22. Whatever their origins and subsequent history, by 1851 they had a servant - unmarried Bridget Thomas, nineteen years and Irish-born - and seventeen lodgers. These last must have been an important source of income, along with McDermott's stated occupation of marine store dealer.

The name of McDermott was in the columns of the local newspaper, the *Wrexham and East Denbighshire Weekly Advertiser*, on 21 February 1851. Three boys were charged at the Petty Sessions on 16 February with Stealing spoons and toys from McDermott's shop window in Mount Street and hiding them in the local churchyard. McDermott marched the boys to their home in nearby Tuttle Street, 'here more stolen spoons were found. McDermott was willing to ignore the affair but the boys' mother became abusive - 'using bad language' - so the police were called. The bench - H.W.Meredith, Esq. and Captain Panton, R.1SL - dismissed one boy and decided not to send the other two to Ruthin Gaol - 'as they would come out worse than they went in' - but instead to the bridewell to be 'soundly whipped'

So, from the local press, we learn that the McDermotts, in addition to their marine stores and their lodgers, had a shop. Eight years on from the latest possible

date of their arrival in Wrexham it looked as though they were beginning to acquire some substance. A further sign of this may have been the report of a donation of five shillings that McDermott made on 23 May to the fund for a widow of a shot tollgate keeper. There are three significant elements to this: that he was asked to contribute; that he felt obliged to do so to maintain his reputation; and it was reported in the local press. A fourth may have been his natural generosity, although a later incident was to show that this could reach breaking point.

By July, McDermott was announcing on the front page of the '*Advertiser*' that he was enlarging and diversifying his trading operations:

P.McDermott, Mount Street, Wrexham, respectfully informs the gentlemen and farmers of Wrexham and its vicinity, that to his business of Marine Store Dealer, he has added that of Horse Dealer, and shall be most happy to supply with every kind of IRISH or WELSH HORSES and PONIES. He is in the habit of travelling periodically through the greater portion of Ireland and Wales, and has therefore an ample opportunity of making a choice and large selection of those useful and admired animals. Gentlemen wishful to purchase Horses of a superior class can be accommodated on the shortest possible notice.<sup>154</sup>

He placed this notice regularly until 30 January 1858, after which there was no further mention, publicly, of his venture. This could imply the total failure of the enterprise, or its lack of profitability compared to that of the marine stores or McDermott's waning interest in horse-trading. Whatever the reason, the episode may provide a clue to McDermott's previous life in Ireland. Was he drawing upon his experience in small-holding, in dealing in animals? From 1858 on, his life was to be centred on his marine stores, his shop-keeping and, as we shall see, his property

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<sup>154</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 18 July 1857.



speculation. For now though, McDermott had some way to go before respectability and position were to be as fully accorded him as his trade allowed. On 21 September 1857, at Wrexham Petty Sessions, he charged a Mrs Bridget Slawson with being drunk and disorderly on the 14 August. Finding the drunkenness not proved, the magistrates threw out the case with the somewhat dismissive comment that it was 'evidently a quarrel between two of a trade.'<sup>155</sup> Thus may have the bench revealed its social perspective and contemporary society's hierarchy of occupations.

When next Patrick McDermott appeared in the columns of the local press he was cast in a minor role. On 23 October 1858, the '*Advertiser*' carried a report of 'An Irish Bridal, after the manner of the Times of old' which began with a paean of praise to the Irish character:

an insular and patriotic people .... general good nature .... kind and affectionate manner towards each other .... undying love for the land of their birth .... merry light-ness of heart .... deep and violent feelings .... quick yielding to generous impulses and passions .... these and other noble traits in the Irish character ...<sup>156</sup>

It seemed that Thomas MacDaniel and Margaret Higgins of Tuttle Street had been married on 18 October and that the 'invite' to the festivities had included every Irishman, woman and child in Wrexham. The groom, one of high character for sobriety and industry, was described as ruddy-skinned and of stalwart race who 'hurled back the thunderbolts of the Muscovites, shouting their deathless slogan, 'FOIG - A - BALLAGH''. The bride had won golden opinions for her unadorned simplicity and loveliness: a dark-haired, dark-eyed, true Milesian maiden with pure,

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<sup>155</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 26 September 1857.

<sup>156</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 23 October 1858.

limpid eyes radiant with the confiding smiles of generous youth and with a voice 'the soul of love'. The bagpipes were played for dancing; Mr Macnamara sang songs in Erse and, all in all, the occasion was one when 'the heart's right hand exchanged the friendly grasp of the stranger'. Mr McDermott 'rendered able assistance to the worthy host and his friend Tom in serving around the different varieties of good old Irish cheer'. The celebrations ended at eleven o'clock 'with no unhealthy excitement' for 'the hopes which gladdened the morning had gently yielded to the influence of Nature's sweet restorer-balmy sleep'<sup>157</sup> It would seem from this account that, contrary to popular belief, not all Irish celebrations were bacchanalian, but it may be open to question whether the inclusion of the word 'communicated' at the end of the report was intended as tongue-in-cheek scepticism or as a disclaimer of responsibility. Another point to note is that Patrick McDermott was not averse to alcohol.

Further information about McDermott may be gleaned from the Wrexham General District Rate Books. On 8 June 1859, the Borough fixed the rate at one shilling in the £. Patrick McDermott was listed in Entry No. 377 as the tenant of a Miss Williamson, in a shop and house in Mount Street, rateable value £20 per annum. Ten years after their arrival in the town, the McDermotts were still in their Mount Street home. However, McDermott was also listed in rate book entries Nos. 651, 654 and 724 as the owner of two houses in Church Hill and one in Mount Street. Their rateable values were £2.15s.0d, £1.15s.0d and £4.10s.0d respectively. Our immigrant Irishman was beginning to become a man of property.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 23 October 1858.

<sup>158</sup> Wrexham General District Rate Book, 1859, County Record Office, Ruthin, BD/C/371.

The census of 1861 fell on 7 - 8 April. The most striking features of the house in Mount Street were the increase in the McDermott family since 1851; the disappearance of the seventeen lodgers of the previous count and the fact that the McDermotts were shown as having originally come from Galway. There were five children listed: Michael, 8, Patrick, 6, Catherine, 3, Bernard, 2, and Agnes, one month.<sup>159</sup> All had been born in Wrexham. What had happened to Mary Ann and Catharine who in 1851 were two years and six months and who in 1861 should have been given as twelve and ten years? Were they away from home that census night? Future censuses would suggest a more woeful explanation: their names would not appear again. Patrick McDermott was once more listed as a marine store dealer. The lodgers of 1851 had gone; in their place were two unmarried nephews: first, Michael Burke, 23 years and Irish-born, who was described as a marine store dealer's assistant and, secondly, Joseph Beegan, 15 years, from Chester and also an assistant in a marine store. Presumably, the marine store mentioned was McDermott's. The fourth Irish-born member of the household was Mary Cox, a house servant. In all, the house occupants numbered ten, or a dozen fewer than the 1851 total; with no lodgers - in itself a sign of improving family fortunes. The McDermotts were now running an established business, had rid themselves of lodgers-for-profit, had enlarged their family and owned three houses. A very discernible movement.

Mention of McDermott's nephews, Michael Burke and Joseph Beegan, both of whom in 1861 were working in the family marine store, calls to mind the chain migration so characteristic of the Irish in the nineteenth century. Presumably, given the name difference, the nephews must have been the children of Ann McDermott's

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<sup>159</sup> Census Enumeration, 1861.

siblings or of Patrick McDermott's sisters. Whereas Burke was born in Ireland, pre-Famine, Beegan was Chester - born, circa 1846, a fact which suggests that part of the family had emigrated from Ireland quite soon after, or even before, the beginning of the Famine. They would not therefore have been the utterly poor Irish of the Famine years. This could explain the comparative success of the McDermotts in Wrexham in that their upward mobility did not begin at rock bottom but some way into the ascent. The family had substance enough to sustain a chain of migration the first evidence of which we have in the 1861 census with the enumeration of Burke and Beegan, to be followed by confirmation in the columns of the 1871 and 1881 censuses where McDermott's brother, Martin, and Michael Burke were listed as living in what came to be known as McDermott's Buildings.

However, blood and marriage ties did not always guarantee a happy ending. Joseph Beegan appeared in the Case Book of Male Paupers and Private Patients, 1875 - 78, of the North Wales Asylum at Denbigh.<sup>160</sup> He was admitted there on 3 April 1875 and died there, fourteen years later, on 29 December 1889, aged 43 years. His problem was 'epileptic insanity', a condition in which he was found wandering the streets of Wrexham and from which he was 'rescued' by the local workhouse. The notes of the medical officer at Denbigh Asylum reveal that, in his opinion, Joseph Beegan was dangerous, especially to women, but clean, though undersized and nervous in temperament. How did this nephew of Patrick McDermott come to be in Denbigh Asylum? The doctor's notes state that Beegan - 25 years, single, Roman Catholic and a labourer -

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160 C.R.O., Ruthin, Document Ref. HD/1/360.

was a servant at his uncle's at Wrexham and having become  
troublesome on account of the fits and consequent violence, former  
discharged him without giving him any assistance whatsoever ....  
found wandering in the streets twelve months ago, being left starving  
by his uncle .... taken to the workhouse where he has been ever  
since ....

McDermott family solidarity had its limits it would seem.

Property development was the theme of the next mention of McDermott in the columns of the '*Advertiser*'. He and his family had by 1867 moved a short distance into Yorke Street but, at this point, we do not know whether or not they had abandoned their earlier house and shop in Mount Street. The '*Advertiser*' reported that the Borough wished to purchase part of McDermott's land in Yorke Street for road widening.<sup>161</sup> He wanted trapdoor access from the street to his own cellar and a grating in the pavement similar to those of Messrs Hughes and Son in Hope Street. He wrote to the Highway Committee stating that he would accept their offer of £25 if they would permit the installation of the grating; if they did not, he wanted £40.<sup>162</sup> Committee members said that he ought to have the trapdoor inside his shop. By 28 May it seemed that his grating/trapdoor had been approved by one committee and refused by another: impasse ensued. It was told to one committee by a Mr Williamson that he had met McDermott at the fair and had clarified matters: greater traffic was anticipated so that the building would have to be set back somewhat from the road. This meant that McDermott's development in Yorke Street was to be new,

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<sup>161</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 4 May 1867.

<sup>162</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 18 May 1867.

a fact not made explicit in the previous accounts. The committee still refused McDermott's terms and were warned that they laid themselves open to a lawsuit.

This was first intimation that McDermott was about to erect the buildings that were to bear his name, McDermott's Buildings. Proposed plans were approved by the Buildings and Sanitary Committee at its meeting on 4 May, 1867.<sup>163</sup> FIGURES 9 to 12 show the proposed houses and shops at 15, 16 and 17, Yorke Street, three storeys on to the frontage and four at the back. There was to be an archway through the building giving cart and carriage access to the back and the plans gave details of architectural features such as cornices, corbels and diaper work. From the plans it may be seen that McDermott intended more than a plain functional structure.

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163 C.R.O., Ruthin, M.F.D./1728.

FIGURE 9

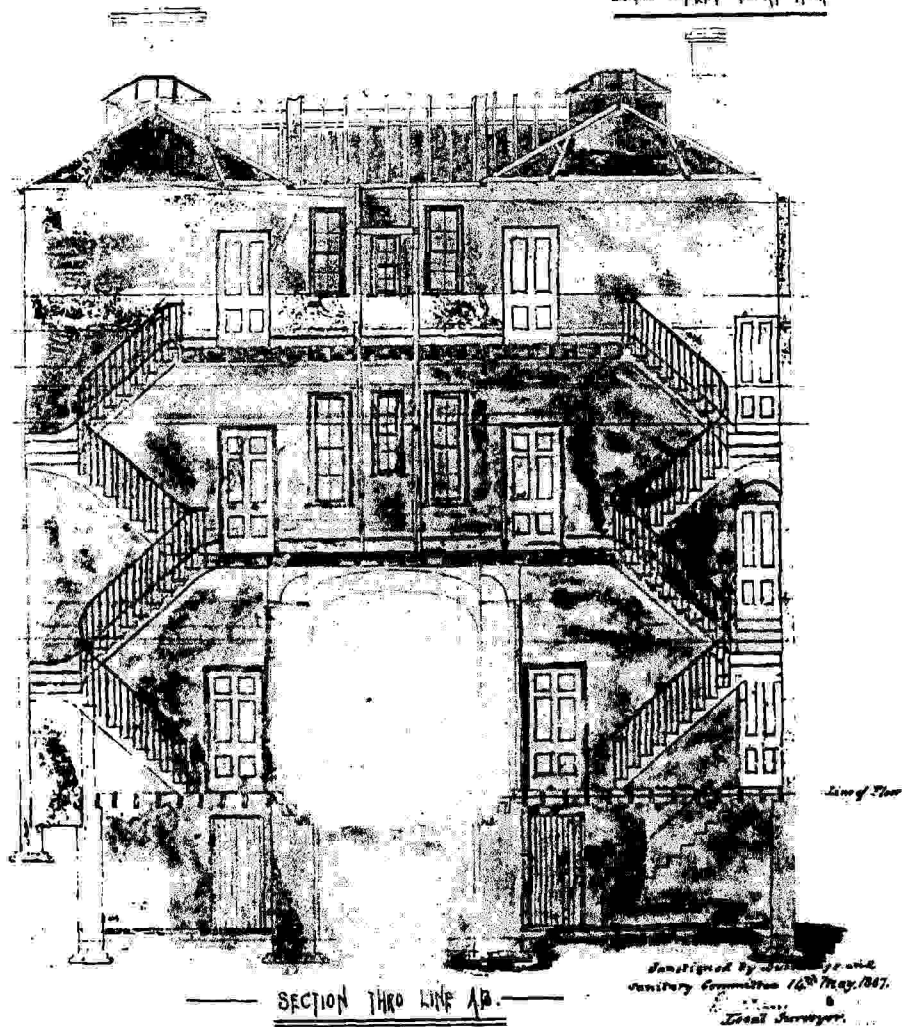
DRAWING N<sup>o</sup> 6

M<sup>r</sup> P M<sup>c</sup> DERMOTT

PROPOSED HOUSES & SHOPS

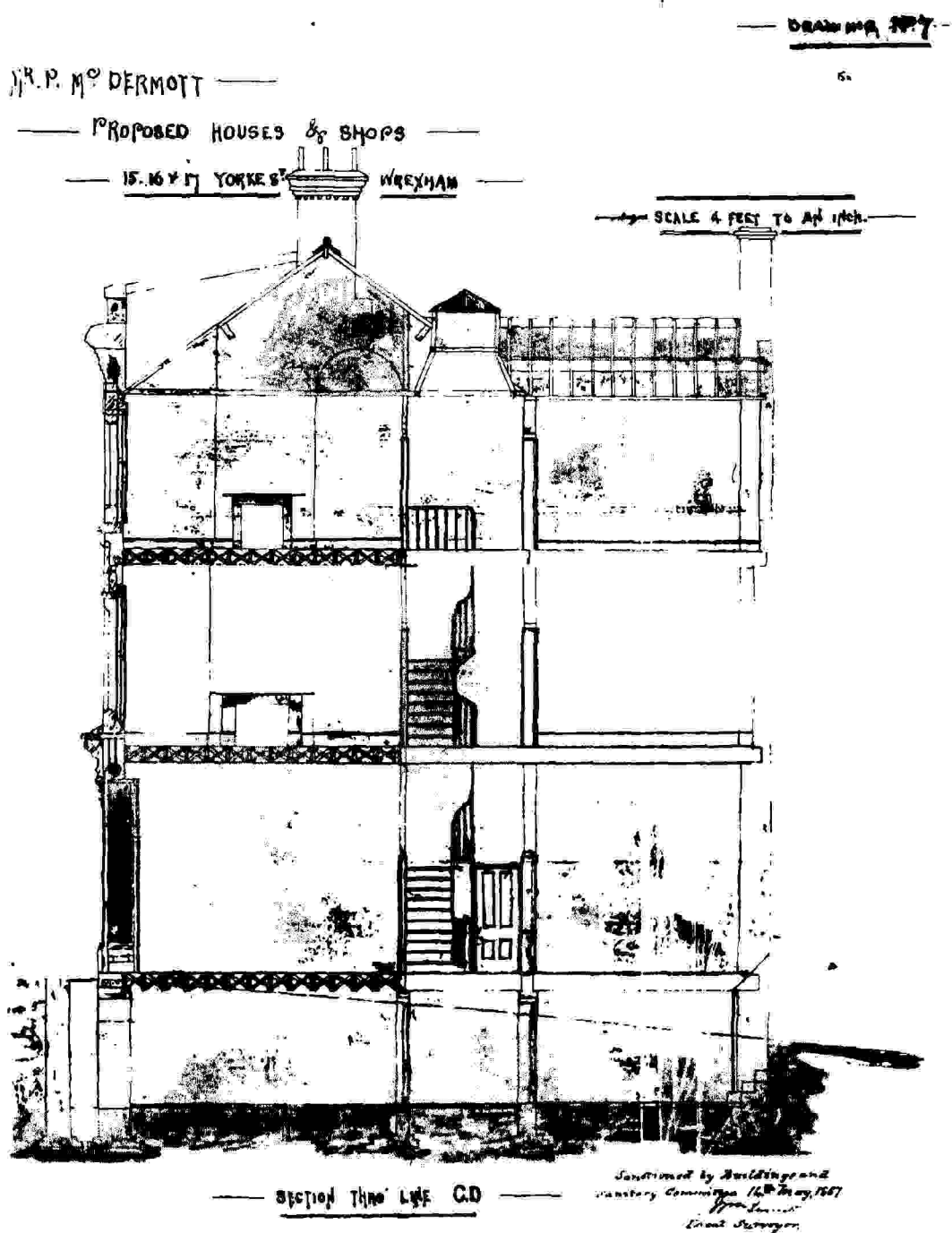
13, 16 & 17 YORKE STREET WREXHAM.

SCALE 4 FEET TO AN INCH



Source: Wrexham Reference  
Library

FIGURE 10



Source: Wrexham Reference  
Library



DRAWING NO. 9

15.16 & 17 YORKE ST WREXHAM

Sanctioned by Buildings and Sanitary Committee 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1880  
 J. P. [illegible]  
 Dist. Surveyor

161

DRAWING NO. 10. -



162

Twelve months after the negotiations with Wrexham Borough Council, Patrick McDermott appeared in the Special Petty Sessions in Mold, a town twelve miles to the North-West of Wrexham. He was a witness, on 11 May 1868, when an Edwin Withers was charged with stealing two hundred hundredweights of lead from an old foundry roof at Rhydymwyn. Thomas Whaldron, on behalf of his principal, Patrick McDermott, said he had bought 101 lbs. of lead from Withers on 19 March, lead which he had sent on to Wrexham on 28 April. McDermott apparently sold the lead to a plumber on 2 May: the lead was identified as that missing from Rhydymwyn. Withers was committed to the Quarter Sessions.<sup>164</sup> The significance of this incident is the intelligence it provided that McDermott had a marine store business other than his base in Wrexham. Another step on the way to being a man of property.

Listed under 'Miscellaneous' in a local trade directory<sup>165</sup> as a general dealer, McDermott was also given in the General District Rate Books for 31 August 1869 as the owner of his Mount Street premises. He had at some point in the previous ten years exchanged tenancy for ownership. This was Entry No. 468, house, shop and - surprisingly - a foundry with a rateable value of £40 on which, at 1s.9d in the £, he paid £2.12s.6d. Furthermore, he owned a house in Mount Street, rated at £6, which he rented to a James Fitzgerald, plus his property, McDermott's Buildings in Yorke Street, rateable value £25.10s.0d, which he rented to five tenants. (It may be illuminating to compare these rateable values with those in other 'Irish' areas in town, e.g. Pentrefelin and Isle of Man: seventeen houses with a total value of

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<sup>164</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 16 May 1868.

<sup>165</sup> *Slaters Directory*, 1869.

£39.6s.0d or an average of £2.6s.2d each; thirty five houses in Yorkshire Square with a total of £53.5s.0d, or £1.10s.5d each). So it would appear that by 1869, or some twenty years after his arrival in Wrexham, Patrick McDermott had purchased his house and shop in Mount Street and added to it a foundry, sold off two properties in Church Hill and bought and rented out another in Mount Street. A substantial place in Yorke Street bore his name: Patrick McDermott, shopkeeper, general dealer, iron founder, landlord.

The 1871 census confirmed the fact that McDermott and his family had moved into McDermott's Buildings, 16 Yorke Street being given as their address.<sup>166</sup> Patrick, by now 53 years old, was described as 'Master Iron Founder and General Dealer, employing 13 men, 20 women and 6 boys.' Ann, 47, was given as 'Shopkeeper, Small and Hardware dealer'. The children were six in all, Michael, 18, assistant to father as iron founder, and scholars Bernard, 12, Agnes, 10, Charles, 7, Honor, 6, and William, 4. The nephew, Michael Burke, named in 1861 had gone but the second nephew in the previous census, Joseph Beegan (he of the 'epileptic insanity'), was labouring in the foundry, by this time married. The McDermotts had three domestic servants, none Irish-born and all unmarried, aged 47, 18 and 16.

On the face of it, 1871 seemed something of a high point in McDermott's fortunes, the golden moment of which was celebrated on the bed of a reservoir. On 13 May, the *Wrexham Advertiser* carried the account of the opening of Oswestry's six million gallon reservoir at the Mount. The original contractor, Mr Jaynes, had become bankrupt and McDermott, as his bondsman, had completed the work and, as

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<sup>166</sup> Census Enumeration, 1871.

part of the official opening, entertained the Mayor and Town Council of Oswestry to a champagne lunch on the bed of the reservoir. McDermott proposed the health of the Queen and Royal Family, together with that of the Mayor, and received the Corporation's thanks in return. The general congratulatory tone of the ceremonies was soured only by the Town Clerk who could not resist reminding McDermott that the contract was not completed. However, the Town Clerk cheered up enough to compliment McDermott on being 'an upright, straight forward and honest man'. He could not, in all conscience, recommend that McDermott be made to pay the penalties for not completing the contract on time: he was 'an innocent man' and others had been to blame. Upon completion of the speeches, the Mayor, the Corporation and Mr Patrick McDermott ascended the steps of the reservoir and turned on the water.<sup>167</sup> It must all have seemed a long way from Galway.

If the feast in the reservoir had been McDermott's high summer, he should perhaps have expected a rumble of thunder. It was heard in August. The *Advertiser* on 26 August reported that Christopher Lawless, Irish-born and 21 years old, son and barman at the *Ship* in Yorke Street, had set out on an expedition with James Jones of the *Cross Foxes* in Abbot Street, together with Patrick McDermott, the son missing from the enumeration some months earlier. The three, with Jones's aunt and a young woman, had gone by pony and trap to Erbistock, a hamlet some six or seven miles distant on the River Dee. At some point young McDermott and Jones went swimming in the river and got into difficulties. Lawless rescued McDermott but Jones was drowned.<sup>168</sup> The summer lightning had missed -narrowly- and one wonders if McDermott Senior was one for seeing omens and portents.

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<sup>167</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 13 May 1871.

<sup>168</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 26 August 1871.

The following year, 1872, saw McDermott with even more property. The General District Rate Books for Wrexham for 27 February 1872 give McDermott as the owner of fifteen houses in and near Mount Street, including Entry Nos. 199 - 200, 630 - 631, 827 - 828, 911 - 912. Nos. 827 and 911 had multiple occupancy.<sup>169</sup> 1872 also saw McDermott in a little trouble as an employer. The *Advertiser* reported that the men at his foundry had gone on strike on 25 February in support of the Nine-hour Movement and had stayed out all week. McDermott conceded the desired reduction of hours.<sup>170</sup> His affairs continued steadily and Slater's Directory for 1876 lists him as 'a marine store and general dealer,' with no mention of the iron foundry; furthermore, his plans submitted for approval for the -re-building of No. 4, Mount Street, show that his original business was thriving. His plans submitted on 11 July 1877 were approved by the Borough General Purposes committee.

(FIGURE 13)

The 1881 census found Patrick McDermott still as head of his household, aged 60 years, and still a general dealer.<sup>171</sup> The 'master iron founder' he was in 1871 had been diluted to a mere 'iron founder' and there is no mention of the size of his workforce. His wife, Anne, 57 years, has acquired a final 'e' to her name and was no longer described as a smallwares dealer. Michael, their eldest son, had moved out; by 1881 he would have been 28 years. Bernard, 21 and unmarried, was still at home but Agnes who would have been 20, was not listed. Nor was Charles, 17 years. Honora, had, like her mother, gained a final vowel on her name. William, 14, was at home. All together, on census night, the McDermotts had four visitors and two

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169 General District Rate Books, C.R.O., Ruthin, Document BD/C/371.

170 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 9 March 1872.

171 Census Enumeration. 1881.

unmarried serving girls, 19 and 16, from Holt and from Ireland, giving a household of eleven. Thus far, Patrick and Ann McDermott, of Galway, had lived in Wrexham for over thirty years and had ten children. Two of these children appeared only once in the census returns, in 1851; one, Patrick, had narrowly escaped drowning, in 1871. All the McDermotts' children were born in Wrexham, a sign in itself of commitment to the town and one which disallows the universal application of the claim that the Wrexham Irish in the later nineteenth century were mobile rather than settled.

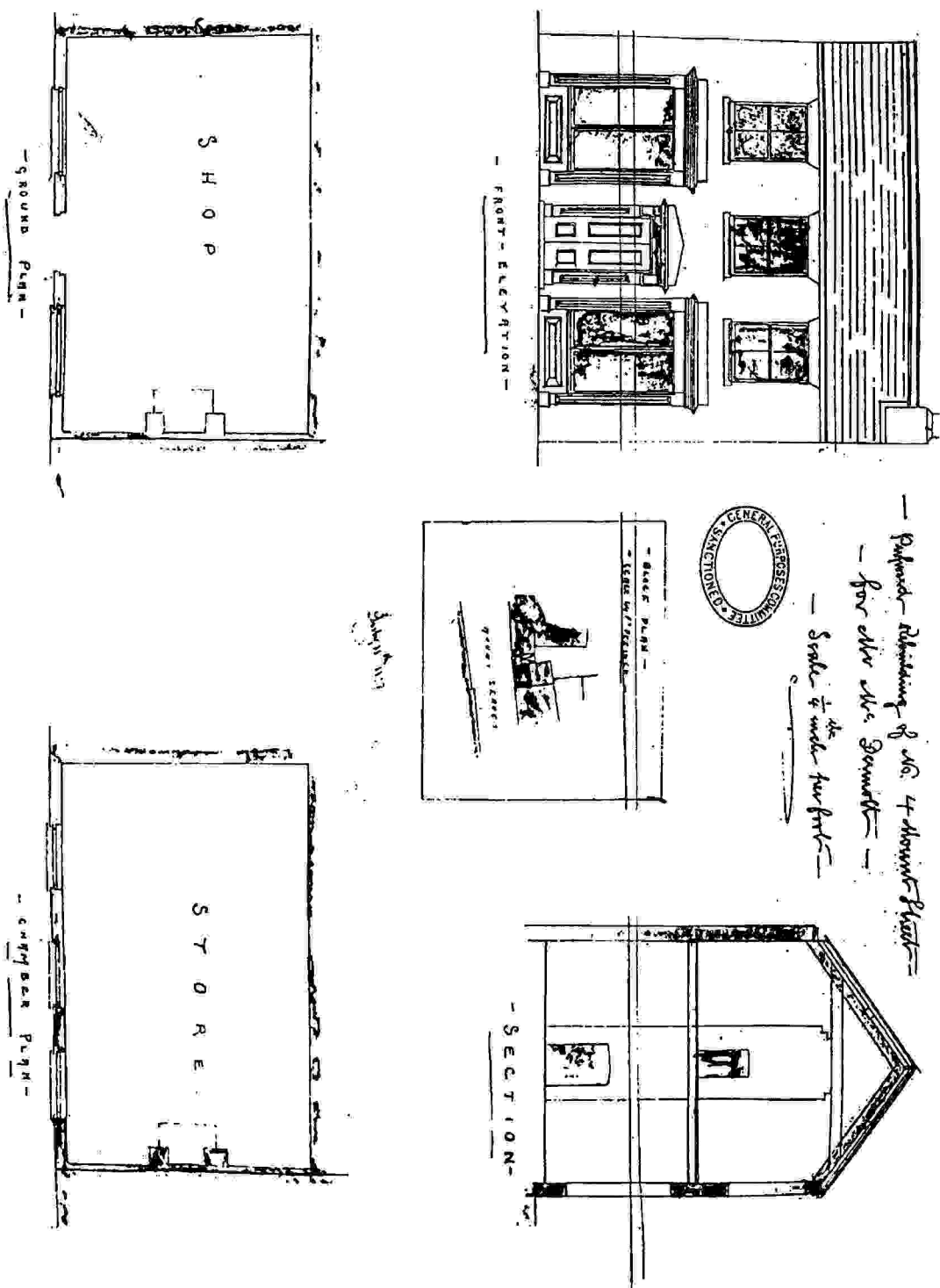
By 28 February 1882, McDermott had shed some properties and retained ownership of only five, with his brother, Martin, in Entry No. 576;<sup>172</sup> by 1886, the trade directory had him as a 'smallware, general and marine stores dealer' with no mention of a foundry.<sup>173</sup> Were these signs of declining energy and consequent simplification of his business affairs or perhaps a devolution of his earthly goods and enterprises to his children and others? We are by 1886 out of our period of study, 1851 to 1881, but as far as the McDermott family was concerned the leading role seemed to pass to his brother, Martin, his wife and their heirs.

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172 General District Rate Book, 1882, C.R.O., Ruthin, BD/C/371.

173 Slater's, *op. cit.*, 1886, p.297.

FIGURE 13:



Source: Wrexham  
Reference Library



Martin and Mary had followed Patrick McDermott to Wrexham in a process of chain migration. Martin died on 1 April 1899, aged seventy-two years, and passed his estate to Mary. The Calendar of the Grants of Probate shows that she, of No. 1, McDermott's Buildings, a widow, died a year later on 16 February 1900, aged sixty-seven years.<sup>174</sup> Administration of her effects amounting to £146 12s 0d was granted at St.Asaph on 30 March to her son, Patrick Joseph McDermott, general dealer. Five years later, on 3 November 1905, Patrick Joseph McDermott himself died at McDermott's Buildings, aged 53 years. Letters of administration of his effects valued at £157 9s 3d were granted to his brother, James, a plasterer. All three - Martin, Mary and their son - were buried in Wrexham Cemetery in Pen-y-Bryn.

The historiography of the nineteenth-century Irish migrant has been rightly concerned with the degree of integration into and segregation from the British host community. How far did cultural diffusion occur and over what period? Reinforcement of the immigrants 'Irishness' no doubt took place as part of the process of social cohesion - in the pubs and clubs, Gaelic League meetings, at church - but, without doubt also, succeeding generations of migrants assimilated into British society on a very large scale. Lynn Lees has argued that most Irish migrants in London clung to their ethnic identity over three or four generations<sup>175</sup> but, on the other hand, W.J.Lowe concluded that in Lancashire by the 1870s they had largely lost their distinctive Irishness.<sup>176</sup> Again, Holmes has contended that their sense of difference from the host society was reinforced by the latter's hostility.<sup>177</sup> Fitzpatrick

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174 Calendar of the Grants of Probate and Letters of Administration, Probate Registers of the High Court of Justice in England. 1900, C.R.O., Ruthin.

175 Lynn Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London*, (Manchester 1979), p.249.

176 W.J.Lowe, *The Irish in mid-Victorian Lancashire*, (New York), 1989.

177 C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971*, (London) 1988, pp.20-22, 36-42.

has denied this. The debate continues, normally in broad terms, that is, concerned with overall figures and generalised themes of social and cultural import. The Irish have been lumped together, the account of their British experience homogenised. This study of the McDermott family was born of an attempt to examine the consistency of this amalgam.

## SUMMARY

While not denying that many Irish in the four towns lived in areas which were distinctly their own, they did not inhabit 'ghettos'. Without doubt, they clustered, but were by no means physically isolated from the rest of the town. The Bulleys Yard enclave in Mold was the single most clearly-defined Irish area, for there were but few Irish in the remainder of the town, but in Wrexham they were to be found in two main areas - St Giles and Pentrefelin - with overflows into nearby parts as the century progressed. Holywell also had two clear Irish areas, but the Irish distribution throughout the town was quite widespread. It was in Flint that Irish settlement was most fluid and dynamic, its changes reflecting the more rapid economic development rate. There was a more even distribution of the Irish in the town, but nevertheless, there were obvious Irish parts, e.g., Roskell's Square, Duck Lane, etc.

Such a picture of clustering and spread chimes with that of Irish settlement in small towns in other parts of the country. In Stafford, for instance, the Irish were scattered, but mostly in 'pockets of slum housing which existed before the bulk of the Irish arrived'.<sup>178</sup> However, not all the Irish lived in slums, or in exclusively Irish parts. Pooley points this fact out in his summary of the work of such students of the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain as Lees and Lobban.<sup>179</sup> More recently, MacRaild has shown that existing housing conditions in Cleator and Barrow in Cumbria predetermined the settlement pattern of the Irish in those places. Both were without

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<sup>178</sup> J. Herson, 'Irish Migration and Settlement in Victorian Britain: a small-town perspective', in Swift and Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Britain, 1815 - 1939*, (London, 1989), p.95.

<sup>179</sup> C. Pooley in Swift and Gilley, *ibid.*, pp. 70 -72.

'court-style' buildings where poor Irish could live and consequently the Irish were not spatially apart from the rest of the community. Whitehaven, however - an older 18th-century town- had a stock of dilapidated housing where the poor Irish were to be found in concentration.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, MacRaild says, it was in the courts, cellars and lodging houses of Whitehaven that the nearest thing to a ghetto was to be found; or in the Barrow Island Huts where, in 1881, seventeen percent of the town's Irish were to be found.<sup>181</sup>

Following MacRaild's thesis, it could be argued that Wrexham, Mold and Holywell, being older established towns, had areas of dilapidated housing where the poor Irish could congregate upon their arrival. On the other hand, in 1851, Flint was a smaller town - half the size of Wrexham - and due to grow by almost two thousand over the next thirty years as its economy developed. At mid-century, it had little to attract inward migration and its few Irish were spread about the town. Its housing stock needed to be increased rapidly as the population grew and, as a result, clustering of the Irish could occur, as, for example, in Roskell Square. If clearly - defined 'Little Irelands' were ever to be found in Flint, it was in the later part of the century when more cheap housing became available for the immigrant Irish. But, as MacRaild points out, by then the dispersal of Irish about their towns was well under way. 'By the 1870s most native residents of the urban townscape had first-hand experience of living side-by-side with Irish neighbours'.<sup>182</sup>

An example of an Irish cluster was found in Mount Street in Wrexham and this chapter has attempted a micro-study of the street, together with a comparison

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180 D.M. MacRaild, (1998), *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

181 *ibid.*, p.58.

182 *ibid.*, p.12.

with an Irish enclave in Mold. Over the period 1841 to 1871, Mount Street witnessed its Irish-born numbers increase from 38 to 82 and then, from 1871 to 1881, decrease to 68. At its highest, the percentage of Irish-born was 17%, in 1861; at its lowest, 13%, in 1841 and 1881. Towards the end of the century, Mount Street saw its Irish-born contingent settle its numbers down to the level they were before the Great Famine. There had been no spectacular variations over the years. More change in the Mount Street Irish community at large had occurred, change which, by and large, was the reverse of the variations sustained by the Irish-born. For instance, the Irish were almost 40% of Mount Street's inhabitants in 1851, down by 19% by 1871 and back to just over 30% by 1881. This curve was echoed by the density of house occupancy: 1861 with 5.6 per Irish house; 1871 with 4.2 and 1881 with 6.25. Occupations also showed variations with the unskilled increasing from 40% to 70% over the period; the semi-skilled moving from 5% in 1851 to 20% in 1871 and back to 5% by 1881. The skilled element went from 15% to 5% to 20%. The Irish community at large was mobile and the Mount Street Irish were no exception. There were signs of gradual integration into Wrexham society as a whole and more than a hint of upward mobility.

This social change was considered in a study of a single family, the McDermotts, thereby narrowing further the focus upon the Irish in Wrexham from town to street to house. Plainly, the story of the McDermotts in Wrexham was not typical of that of the poor Irish - and largely Roman Catholic - immigrants in mid-to late-Victorian Britain. The Irish were the poorest of the poor, set apart from the generality of Britons by virtue of their class, nationality and religion. Not so the McDermotts. Roger Swift has pointed out that the various aspects of Irish 'apartness' tended to reinforce each other and that 'the resulting social segregation inhibited the

development of closer personal contacts with, and therefore of wider economic opportunity in, the British Protestant-owned and run economy'<sup>183</sup> Here doubtless lies the fount of the McDermotts' distinctive story and perhaps an indication that social class, rather than native wit and effort, was the chief determinant of social advancement. In their case, personal contacts and economic opportunities were not exactly restricted for trade cannot exist with such inhibitions as Swift cites. Furthermore, we are enabled to learn a good deal about their lives because trade and all that flows from it can provide a more solid picture of its practitioners than basic census data can of the anonymous poor: men of property leave behind more documentary evidence. The poor man's public life may be contained in a passing reference in his local newspaper - the occasional Saturday night misdemeanour perhaps - but the wealthier citizen appears at civic functions, places advertisements, disputes over property rights, is reported in the press, engages in lawsuits, leaves a will. In short, we can know more about Patrick and Ann McDermott from Galway than about unregarded Pat and Bridget from somewhere in Ireland.

Of the Irish who came to Britain before and after the Great Famine years, many moved on. But some stayed and prospered: the McDermotts were such as these. Their settlement and gradual advancement in the town gave the lie to the stereotype of the migrant nineteenth century Irish - poor, diseased, housed in squalor, outcast and without prospects. One does not know what assets the McDermotts possessed when they reached Wrexham - some Irish were not required to emigrate at all -but, however much or little they had, diligence, good husbandry and investment in the town paid their dividends, however modest. In the McDermotts, we see an

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183 R.E. Swift in P.O' Sullivan, (ed.), (Leicester), 1992, p.73.

aspect of the Irish experience in nineteenth-century Britain which is not always visible and it hoped that this look at one family will provide an element of concreteness in a general picture of the Irish, an account of Irish migrants who were different enough to stand out from the traditional portrayal of their impoverished kith and kin.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### OCCUPATIONS



## OCCUPATIONS OF THE IRISH IN WREXHAM, MOLD, HOLYWELL AND FLINT, 1851 - 1881

Four questions concerning demography were framed earlier in this study. How many Irish were there in North-east Wales between 1851 and 1881? What were they like? Where did they live? The fourth question was implied in another: why were they there? There can be many reasons for a person's arrival in a town, but for the majority of the Irish at this time the prime reason was uncomplicated. They needed work. The fourth question, therefore, must be: what did they do for a living? Other questions follow in the train of this. For instance, was there a hierarchy of Irish (and non-Irish) occupations and did it change over the period? What position in the economy did the Irish occupy? And so on.

Invaluable in this study is W.A. Armstrong's Classification of Occupations<sup>184</sup> in which the following classes are detailed:

- I - Professional, including such occupations as solicitor, clergyman, physician;
- II - Semi-professional, including factory manager, teacher, local board officer;
- III - Skilled, including blacksmith, carpenter, watchmaker, miner;
- IV - Semi-skilled, including agricultural labourer, cook, gardener, machine worker;
- V – Unskilled, including labourer, hawker, rag and bone man, porter;
- VI – Residual, including pensioner, at home (widow, son, daughter).

By ranking of occupation, movement on the economic ladder can be measured, although it cannot be assumed that a shift from an unskilled job to a

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184 W.A. Armstrong. 'The Use of Information about Occupation', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, (Cambridge, 1972).

skilled trade necessarily resulted in more income. Shoemaking, for instance, was a skill easily acquired and a trade needing little capital outlay. With low entry requirements, the trade was not highly paid. In this matter of classification, much reliance must be placed upon census returns. Indeed, Neal goes so far as to say that the relevant data 'can only be found in census enumerators' sheets'.<sup>185</sup> However caution must be exercised for errors of interpretation and entry could occur.

Enumerators may not always have correctly entered the information given them by household heads. Those counted may have inflated the nature of their work or given what they did in Ireland as their occupation since arrival in Wales. Often the entries revealed a desire to distinguish between degrees of labourer: 'agricultural labourer' was one such - with some justification considering the range of skills needed in the job - but it is not immediately obvious what distinction could be made between, say, labouring in a chemical works and labouring in a brickyard, or on the railway. Nevertheless such distinctions were recorded.

In Wrexham, the Irish-born moved into the more skilled categories over the period, 1851 to 1881. In Class IV, semi-skilled, after the rise in 1861, they declined. (See TABLE 27). This may have been due in part to a census aberration whereby agricultural labourers were wrongly classified. (1851: 22%; 1861: 45%; 1871: 6%; 1881: 4%). 1871 and 1881 show a more settled (and typical) state for the Irish-born. By the last quarter of the century, the town had changed from its previous economic base and was developing as a commercial and financial centre: things were settling down and this was reflected in the employment available to the Irish.

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185 F. Neal, 'The Foundations of the Irish Settlement in Newcastle upon Tyne: The Evidence in the 1851 Census' in D.M. MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond: Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (F.Cass, 1999), p.83.

Mold's Irish population seemed to have two patterns of employment, 1851 to the mid-sixties, followed by a second period stretching beyond 1881. The census counts show identical occupational classifications and those of 1871 and 1881 bore a close resemblance to each other: Classes III, IV and V in 1851 and 1861 had 16%, 30% and 54% respectively, while in 1871 and 1881 the percentages were, at most, two points apart.

In Holywell, a change seems to have occurred in the employment pattern between 1851 and 1861. The numbers and percentage of Class III, skilled, were never so low as they were in 1851 and the percentage of Class IV never so high. Thereafter, from 1861 onwards, Classes I and II appeared among the Irish ranks, Class III steadily increased and Class IV from 1861 to 1881 moved from 21% to 14% and back to 27%, averaging 21%. Class V moved from 42% and 52% to fall back to 35% in 1881. Holywell had by far the highest percentage of skilled Irish, Class III, of all four North-east Wales towns, averaging over the four years 27%. Wrexham had 10%, Mold 14.6% and Flint 7%.

Flint had only 39 Irish in 1851, many of whom had no paid employment, so that a valid computation is not possible. By 1861, the Irish workforce was 14% in Class IV and 86% in Class V, a simple amalgam of semi-skilled and unskilled. By 1871, the unskilled base had widened to 87%, the semi-skilled sector had dwindled to 6% but the skilled had increased to 5%. By 1871 also, Classes I and II had appeared because of the arrival of Dublin-born Richard Muspratt, the chemical manufacturer and factory owner. These two classes had increased slightly by 1881, as had the skilled and semi-skilled categories. Thus, by 1881, the Irish workforce in

TABLE 27: Numbers and Percentage of Irish-born and other Irish Classified by occupation \* in Wrexham, Mold, Holywell and Flint, 1851 to 1881.

		WREXHAM, IRISH-BORN				MOLD, ALL IRISH			
		1851	1861	1871	1881	1851	1861	1871	1881
I	Professional	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- 2%	- 1%
II	Intermediate	15 5%	2 1%	2 2%	1 1%	- -	- -	- -	- -
III	Skilled	21 8%	10 5%	31 12%	34 15%	17 16%	12 16%	11 12.5%	11 14%
IV	Semi-Skilled	106 39%	122 58%	55 22%	49 23%	31 30%	22 30%	4 4.5%	3 4%
V	Unskilled	130 48%	76 36%	165 65%	131 61%	56 54%	39 54%	67 76%	62 78%
VI	Residual	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	2 3%
		HOLYWELL, ALL IRISH				FLINT, ALL IRISH			
		1851	1861	1871	1881	1851	1861	1871	1881
I	Professional	- -	2 4%	- -	1 2%	- -	- -	2 1%	4 1.5%
II	Intermediate	1 1%	1 2%	1 1%	- -	- -	- -	1 0.5%	1 0.5%
III	Skilled	15 15%	16 31%	39 29%	17 32%	- -	- -	10 5%	24 9%
IV	Semi-Skilled	20 21%	11 21%	19 14%	14 27%	- -	5 14%	12 6%	21 8%
V	Unskilled	56 58%	22 42%	69 52%	18 35%	- -	31 86%	178 87%	214 81%
VI	Residual	5 5%	- -	5 4%	2 4%	- -	- -	1 0.5%	- -

(Residual Class: Pensioners, Annuitants, Those at Home) \* after W.A. Armstrong

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851 – 1881.

Flint had the following structure: Professional/Managerial 2%; Skilled/Semiskilled 17%; Unskilled 81%.

(TABLE 27 gives the numbers and percentage in each occupational class for the Irish-born in Wrexham and all Irish in Mold, Holywell and Flint from 1851 to 1881.)

#### WREXHAM: IRISH-BORN

For the most part, the livelihood of the town's Irish-born lay in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations. In 1851, thirteen percent of the Wrexham Irish-born were in the Intermediate and Skilled categories. In 1861, these combined categories had fallen to six percent, only to climb back, in 1871, to fourteen percent. The highest percentage, 16%, was reached in 1881. Correspondingly, the percentages of Irish-born semi-skilled and unskilled workers were 87%, 94%, 87% and 84%, that is, the clear majority. However, these percentages were sometimes lower than those for the town as a whole. For example, in 1871, Wrexham's male workforce consisted of 96% semi and unskilled workers and, in 1881, of 91% similarly classified. Other changes over the period included fluctuations in the total Irish-born workforce. From 1851 to 1861, the numbers fell by 64 to 76% of their 1851 level. There was an increase of 43 by 1871 although the total was still only 92% of the 1851 numbers; lastly, from 1871 to 1881, a decrease of 38, or 15%, of Irish-born left the total only 78% of its datum line of 1851.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> In 1851, in St. John's Parish in Chester (2,032 Irish-born in total city population of 27,835), the occupational status of the Irish-born was as follows: I - 1.8%, II - 13%; III - 14.7%; IV - 43.3%; V - 27.2%; K. Jeffes, "The Irish in Early Victorian Chester: an Outcast Community?" in R.E. Swift, (ed.), *Victorian Chester: Essays in Social History, 1830-1900*, (Liverpool University Press), 1996).

Changes also occurred over the period in the numbers of different occupations given in the census returns: 37 in 1851, 26 in 1861, 43 in 1871 and 36 in 1881. These changes may have been due to a combination of alterations in the town's economy as the century progressed and variations in the criteria for classification on the part of the enumerators. Yet another change was clear over the period, the proportion of women in the Irish-born workforce altered from 30% in 1851 to 16% ten years later, 13% in 1871 and 15% in 1881. Why this was so is not obvious and one is led to speculate on how many single women arrived in Wrexham after the Great Famine and had to maintain their economic independence and who, in later years, married and had children and thereafter dropped out of the labour market. Again, married women may not have declared their paid occupations to the census enumerators who, on their turn, may not have accurately interpreted or conscientiously entered the information given.

This last point may be illustrated in the classification of labourers. There seems to have been a hierarchy in this area of occupation, distinction being made between agricultural and other labourers. Consider the figures for Irish-born agricultural labourers 1851 - 1881: they began in 1851 at 64 and increased by 1861 to 95. Thereafter there was a sudden decline to 15 in 1871 and 9 in 1881. How to explain this change? Could the economy of Wrexham have altered so dramatically as to suck workers in from the farms and estates of the surrounding rural locality? Could 'high farming' and mechanisation on the land have driven the workers away in such large numbers? Similarly, there was a change in the numbers of general labourers from 10 in 1851, through 26 in 1861 to a peak of 123 ten years later and 116 in 1881. One may suspect something awry, or at least inconsistent, in classification. However, bricklayers' labourers appear to have been consistently

grouped: 7 in 1851, 9 in 1861, none in 1871 and 9 again in 1881. Perhaps there was a clearer understanding of the nature of the job.

At first glance, 1851 seemed to be the year of highest employment of the Irish-born in Wrexham with 296 listed in 37 occupations. However, as we have seen, the 1851 census was distorted by the coincidence of the town's annual spring fair. Twenty-four strolling players and commercial travellers were included in the count but were obviously not permanent residents of Wrexham. In addition, there were seventy-one hawkers of various goods, a figure not typical as was shown by later enumerations. Omitting the strolling players and travelling salesmen and averaging out the hawkers to, say, twenty-two,<sup>187</sup> reduces the 1851 total Irish-born workforce to two hundred and twenty-three and makes comparisons over the years more realistic. Such adjustment makes 1871 the year of highest employment among the town's Irish-born.

A unique pocket of employment within Wrexham's population was the military barracks in Wrexham Fechan, now Hightown. The 23rd Regiment of Foot was formed in 1689 by William III and was superseded by the Royal Welch Fusiliers in 1881, all the while maintaining links with Wrexham. The Irish were among its numbers. The 1861 and 1871 censuses enumerated only the non-commissioned militia officers and their families so that a complete picture is impossible to draw, thus forcing a reliance upon the 1881 figures for data. In the 1881 census, nineteen Irish-born enlisted men were enumerated, together with twelve Irish-born wives and fourteen Irish-born children, a total of forty-five Irish-born in the full complement of

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<sup>187</sup> Sixty-six hawkers were enumerated in the three years, 1861, 1871 and 1881.

three hundred and eighty-three in the barracks on 3rd April. The nineteen Irish-born soldiers represented almost five percent of the total of the barracks on census night whereas the total Irish-born contingent, including wives and children, equalled almost twelve percent. Of the two hundred and seventy-three enlisted men, those Irish-born represented seven percent. Most of the married Irish-born soldiers were, on average, some twelve years older than their Irish-born wives but only two years older than those of their wives who were not Irish-born. The average age of the married Irish-born soldiers was 43.75 years and of the unmarried Irish-born 25.6 years. The Irish-born wives' average age was 32 years but if a 66-year old widow is omitted from the calculation it was 29 years. The average for the non Irish-born wives of Irish-born men was 41.25 years. This age discrepancy between husbands and wives may perhaps be explained by the soldiers' service abroad and regular internal postings at the earlier age when marriage would usually have been undertaken. Another source of income in Wrexham would have been the Infirmary. However, the 1881 census revealed that there was not one Irish-born person among the eleven patients and five staff on the height of the count. Similarly, at the Union Workhouse in 1881, there was but one Irish-born employee, a portress from Kilkenny.

Throughout the 1851 - 1881 period there were both changes and continuities in the occupations of Wrexham's Irish-born. Rag gatherers, for instance, numbered 34 in 1851, were not in the count at all in 1861, returned with seven in 1871 and disappeared entirely in 1881. Shoemakers, on the other hand, remained at six in each year until 1871 and then were either extinct by 1881 or included with other craftsmen: the heading 'Other Occupations' can hide much fine detail. Lodging-house keepers and publicans moved in the four counts from eight to sixteen, then



sixteen to ten, while servants - almost all of them women - numbered twenty-five in 1851, decreased to eight and then seven in 1861 and 1871, and levelled in 1881 at fifteen. The arrival of 'Retailing' in 1861, to peak in 1871 at eleven and lapse again to six, probably reflected the changing size and economy of the town and the move of the Irish away from manual work. (See TABLE 28)

#### THE OCCUPATIONS OF THE IRISH IN MOLD 1851 - 1881

The largest single occupational groups among the Irish in Mold during the period from 1851 to 1881 were those of labourer and hawker. Within these categories, the agricultural labourers declined, from thirty in 1851 to sixteen in 1861 to none by 1871 and one by 1881. Changes in the economy of the area may have accounted for this, with developing industry along the Dee Estuary attracting population away from the agricultural hinterland. However, the numbers of general labourers grew, from fourteen in 1851 to forty-three by 1881. Together, throughout the period, agricultural and general labourers represented the largest single occupational group, ranging from 39% of the Irish workforce in 1851, through 52% in 1861 and 1871, to 57% in 1881. The other large occupational group, hawkers and street sellers, on the other hand, decreased over the period. Their peak was reached in 1851 with fifteen male and twenty-two female hawkers, together representing 35% of the Irish workers listed. This percentage had dwindled to 21% by 1861, to 22% in 1871 and 16.4% by 1881. Female hawkers outnumbered their male counterparts by twenty-two to fifteen in 1851 but did not achieve this numerical position again until 1881 when there were five male and eight female hawkers. In addition to labourers and hawkers, there were two other Irish occupational groups which appeared in all four-census counts, those of lodging-housekeepers and marine stores dealers. Their

numbers were not large - five lodging housekeepers in 1851, one in 1861, three in 1871 and one again in 1881 - but all were female. Similarly, marine stores dealers were present in all four counts, one female in 1851, the others male. The few Irish miners there were - with none at all listed in 1871 - represented 3% of the Irish workforce in 1851, thereafter approximately 1.5%. It must be remembered that Mold's mines were smaller than those of the Wrexham area and were situated mainly on the outskirts of the town.

Irish stocking makers and vagrant paupers - three and five respectively - disappeared from Mold after 1851. This could have been due to the departure of a single family in which the craft of hand-made stockings was passed from generation to generation or to the growth of cheaper machine-made hosiery in nearby Lancashire and in the East Midlands. The disappearance of Irish paupers from the streets of Mold may have been due to changes in local attitudes towards vagrancy or to the existence of more 'exploitable' prosperity elsewhere, for example, in Flint with its growing industry.

This last factor - local prosperity - could have been reflected in the appearance among the Irish after 1861 and 1871 of such occupations as fishmonger, general dealer, dressmaker, milliner and retailing and of such trades as bricklayer, plasterer and gardener. As permanent shops became the norm so the need for street sellers declined. Other skilled and semi-skilled occupations appeared among the Irish - for example, weaver, gilder, maltster, dyer - so that by 1881 such occupations were ranking third in the hierarchy of Irish employment in the town, after labourers and hawkers. Among professions were an optician and an Ordnance Surveyor.

There was an overall decrease in the numbers of Irish workers during the period: from 104 in thirteen occupations in 1851, through 69 in twelve occupations in 1861 and 88 in fourteen occupations in 1871, to 79 in twelve in 1881. Furthermore, the percentages of Irish males working altered from 64% in 1851, to 83% ten years later and 85% in 1871, to fall to 77% in 1881. The percentages for Irish women dropped from 36% in 1851, to 17% in 1861 and 15% in 1871. By 1881, however, Irish women represented 23% of the Irish workforce in Mold, an increase due not, as one would have expected, to a growth in such occupations as retailing and office work, but to an increase in numbers of hawkers and labourers. (Table 29 summarises the statistics re the Occupations of the Irish in Mold)

## OCCUPATIONS OF THE IRISH IN HOLYWELL

Holywell's Irish enjoyed their best job prospects in 1871 when there were more in work with a greater range of employment. This was a peak achieved after a nadir ten years earlier: from 52 in work in 19 jobs to 133 employed in 32 occupations within a decade. This was also the year when the numbers of skilled and unskilled Irish peaked. TABLE 40 summarises the numbers and percentage membership of the different classes of occupation and indicates the changes in these classes over the period. Class V, Unskilled, had the greatest ebb and flow: 58% - 42% - 52% - 35%. Labourers remained proportionately the largest single group of workers with 16% of the Irish labour force in 1851, 22% in 1861, 23% in 1871 and 27% in 1881. Their numbers, of course, doubled in 1871, the year of highest Irish employment. Hawkers were the largest group in the census enumerations, although their numbers see-sawed from year to year: 41 to ten, then 37 down to three in 1881. At their height, hawkers represented between 28% and 43% of the Irish workforce. In 1851, travellers featured prominently, but almost disappeared thereafter, from eight to two in 1871. These were all men - three in woollens, three in linen, one in books and one unspecified - whose connection with textiles was plain to see; indeed, of thirty-five Irish who lived near the Greenfield Valley's mills and factories, eleven were employed in textile sale or manufacture. Proximity to the workplace was important.

In 1861, representatives of Classes I and II appeared in the census columns: members of the priesthood and the excise department. Five members of the service industries were also in evidence for the first time - dressmakers, milliners, confectioners - but it was in 1871 that the Irish in domestic service surfaced in any significant numbers - servants, housekeepers, ostlers, gardeners - to make up 8.2% of the Irish in employment. The percentage of Irish artisans or makers also rose to 17%

in 1871. These included such occupations as shoemaker and tailor. These percentages were maintained and grew into 1881, with Irish artisans at 15% and domestic servants at 17%. The relationship between Classes I to IV and Class V in the Irish workforce swung over the thirty years from 2:3 to 3:2, moved to 2:2.3 in 1871 and settled in 1881 to 2:1. The Irish had improved their social standing. (See TABLES 27 & 30)

## OCCUPATIONS OF IRISH IN FLINT

An analysis of the occupational structure of an Irish workforce in Flint cannot begin in any meaningful way until the 1861 census. In 1851, the occupations available to the town's workforce were limited and the few Irish in the town were to be found in the unskilled and semi-skilled strata - labouring, plate laying, street selling. The census recorded some who gave their profession as linen weaving, but this was probably more an echo of an earlier life in Ireland than an accurate statement of occupation in Flint. The town had yet to develop its wider economic base. Even by 1861 there were only thirty-six in the Irish workforce, thirty-one of whom - mainly general labourers - were in Occupational Class V. The remaining five were females in domestic service. The Irish at work reflected the dominant industrial concern of Flint in that the labourers were all employed in the chemical works - and many described themselves to census enumerators as chemical labourers - while one was a caustic soda maker and another a vitriol maker.

The 1871 census recorded a five-fold increase in the Irish workforce to 203, of whom seventeen (8%) were female and 186 (92%) were male. Once again, most were in the unskilled group (87%), but 11 % were skilled and semi-skilled. Classes I

and II appeared for the first time. One hundred and sixteen described themselves as general labourers and 58 as chemical labourers. Hawkers numbered only four and lodging-house keepers only one. One Irishman was a chemist, another a policeman, a third a miner; there were two Irish plumbers and three dressmakers. Further up the occupational ladder were a priest, a works manager and two factory owners: these last, and others, employed thirteen Irish servants, indoors and outdoors. The Irish upward mobility may have begun by 1871, but it was tentative, with the great majority concentrated in unskilled employment. Irish occupations may also have shown more variety but they did not yet have the range of employment enjoyed by the indigenous population. Streets where the Irish were prominent did not show the range such as was seen in Holywell Road, a thoroughfare near the town's gas works and the chemical factory: confectioner/grocer, teacher, foreman, butcher, carter, cooper, labourer, boilermaker, stonemason sawyer, shipbuilder, charwoman, bootmaker, gasworks manager, marine pilot, chemical works manager, platelayer and ship's captain. (This last occupation is a reminder that Flint was still a working port for small vessels and the census listed the crew of the steamer, *Secretary* - 37 tons, out of Liverpool - as five Irish-born out of six, including the master and mate from Wicklow).

By 1881, the Irish in Flint followed twenty occupations, five more categories than in 1871. The source of most employment was the chemical works where 164 Irishmen toiled; forty-five other labourers were to be found in various parts of the town. In short, of the 264 working Irish, 214 were labourers (81%). This was a percentage decrease since 1871. As in 1871, the second largest group of employees was that of domestic servants, 13 women and two men, or 5.7%. Thereafter, came coopers, six in all, or 2.3%, in demand perhaps because of increased brewing in the

area or a need for dry chemical containers. Hawkers were still in evidence, five in all and 1.9% of the working Irish, with publicans shortly behind with four, or 1.5%. Just over 1% of the Irish workforce were in each of three categories - dressmakers, milliners, retailing - and, somewhat higher up the occupational scale, chemical manufacturers. Foremen, engine drivers and gardeners in their various categories each almost reached 1%, while masons, surveyors, puddlers, compositors and commercial travellers made up almost 2%. (The percentage of such occupations as surveyor and compositor serves to remind that Flint, though developing at this time, had not shaken off its past: indeed, 0.75% of the Irish 'workforce' were listed as 'beggar on poor relief'). In addition to the increased number of employees in more occupations, a further difference from the Irish in 1871 was the larger number of women working, an increase of 40%. There were no female labourers enumerated in 1871, but five in 1881; no women were in retailing, but three were recorded ten years later; hawkers increased by two and domestic servants by one, the last-named in the household of Richard Muspratt, the Dublin-born chemical manufacturer.

It has been widely assumed that the Irish were to be found exclusively in low-skill jobs. However, Pooley has pointed out that in seven Victorian towns between 17% and 40% of the Irish-born were in skilled or higher-status occupations.<sup>188</sup> More recently, in his study of the Irish in Victorian Cumbria, MacRaild has supported Pooley's finding: 'in no Cumbrian town was the Irish-born workforce denied access to whole sectors of the economy'.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, the Irish featured significantly in iron-mining and production in the North of England, especially in areas where the

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188 C.Pooley, in Swift and Gilley (1989), *op. cit.*, p.70.

189 MacRaild (1998), *op. cit.*, p.92.

190 MacRaild (1999), *op. cit.*, p.69.

opening of new mines was so rapid that traditional pitmen were unable to maintain any protectionist 'no-Irish' policy.<sup>190</sup> Of course, the Irish did have their share of the poorest levels of work, but they were by no means confined in them. In the seven towns in Pooley's study, 50% of Irish males had semi-skilled jobs and, in his study of Greenock, R.D.Lobban says that many Irish 'were able to secure a relatively high occupational and social status'.<sup>191</sup> MacRaild gives illuminating lists of jobs held by the Irish-born in Workington, Cleator, Whitehaven and Barrow, 1851 to 1891.<sup>192</sup> Whitehaven had twelve Irish-born bakers, 26 shoemakers, 18 masons, 34 tailors. Workington had 15 Irish-born dressmakers and eleven shipwrights. Barrow counted machine makers, cabinet makers, customs officers, coachbuilders among its Irish-born workforce. Cleator Moor had seven Irish teachers and a mine superintendent, twelve engine drivers and a sprinkling of blacksmiths, boot makers, clerks and mill overseers. This was evidence that the Irish were at least beginning to reach artisan status.

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191 R.D.Lobban, 'The Irish Community in Greenock in the Nineteenth Century' in *Irish Geography*, 6, (1971), p.276.

192 MacRaild (1998), op. cit., pp.85 - 91.

#### SUMMARY



Armstrong's classification provides an indication of the hierarchy of occupations in the mid - to late - nineteenth-century. The general nature of its categories, coupled with the undoubted vagaries of census entries, may diminish its usefulness to a degree, but it is workable and sufficient to show that, in Wrexham, the Irish moved into the more skilled Classes over the period, whereas, in Mold, little movement of a similar nature was seen. When Classes I to IV are combined, the Irish in Wrexham ranged between 36% to 64%, while in Mold all Irish moved from 17% to 46%. Holywell boasted the highest percentage of Irish in Classes I to IV, a sign perhaps of the town's change from a manufacturing economy to one based on services. These figures show that, in the three older - established towns, the Irish were well in evidence in the higher echelons of the economy. Flint - with characteristic energy - moved between 1871 and 1881 from having 12.5% of its Irish in these classes to 19%.

Table 28: The occupations of Irish-born population, Wrexham 1851 – 1881.

Occupations	1851 : 296 in 37 occupations				1861 : 210 in 26 occupations				1871 : 253 in 43 occupations				1881 : 215 in 36 occupations			
	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%
Hawkers (Various)	45	26	71	24	11	5	16	8	29	6	35	14	11	4	15	7
Agricultural Labourers	64	-	64	22	94	1	95	45	14	1	15	6	9	-	9	4
Rag Gatherers	19	15	34	12	-	-	-	-	-	7	7	3	-	-	-	-
Servant	3	22	25	8	-	8	8	4	1	6	7	3	-	15	15	7
Strolling Player	11	2	13	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Commercial Traveller	11	-	11	4	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
General Labourer	10	-	10	3	26	-	26	12	121	2	123	49	112	4	116	54
Innkeeper / Lodging- housekeeper	5	3	8	3	-	6	6	3	13	3	16	6	2	8	10	5
Bricklayer Labourer	7	-	7	2	9	-	9	4	-	-	-	-	9	-	9	4
Shoemaker	6	-	6	2	6	-	6	3	5	-	5	2	-	-	-	-
Confectioner	3	3	6	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Marine Stone Dealer	-	-	-	-	5	2	7	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Finishing Trade - Small Trades	-	-	-	-	4	3	7	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Retailing	-	-	-	-	4	2	6	3	6	5	11	4	5	1	6	3
Dressmaker / Tailor	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Brewer	-	-	-	-	4	-	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Craftsmen	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	8	3	15	-	15	7
Weaving / Leather Worker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	4	2	-	-	-	-
* Other Occupations	23	18	41	14	14	2	16	8	20	2	22	9	19	1	20	9
Totals	207	89	296	100	177	33	210	100	221	32	253	100	182	33	215	100
% of Irish-born workforce	70	30	-	100	84	16	-	100	87	13	-	100	85	15	-	100

\* For example, Skilled: Carpenter, Bookbinder, Wheelwright, Stonemason, Tailor. Semi-Skilled: Brick maker, rope maker, Cap maker  
Source: Census Returns, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.

Table 29: Profile of the occupations of the Irish in Mold, 1851 to 1881.

Occupations	1851 : 104 in 13 occupations				1861 : 66 in 12 occupations				1871 : 88 in 12 occupations				1881 : 79 in 12 occupations			
	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%
Hawkers (Various)	15	22	37	35	9		9	14	13	7	20	23	5	8	13	16.4
Agricultural Labourers	28	2	30	29	16		16	24	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1.3
General Labourer	13	1	14	13	20		20	30	45	1	46	52	35	8	43	54.3
Lodging- housekeeper	-	5	5	5	-		-	-	-	3	3	3	-	1	1	1.3
Miners	3	-	3	3	1		1	1.6	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1.3
Marine Stone Dealer	-	1	1	1	1		1	1.6	1	-	1	1.2	1	-	1	1.3
Stocking Makers	-	3	3	3	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vagrant / Paupers	3	2	5	5	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bricklayer / Plasterer	-	-	-	-	4		4	6	1	-	1	1.2	1	-	1	1.3
Dressmaker / Milliner	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	4.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gardener	-	-	-	-	1		1	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rag Dealer	-	-	-	-	3	1	4	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fishmonger	-	-	-	-	3	1	4	6	3	-	3	3.5	1	-	1	1.3
General Dealer	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	1	-	1	1.2	6	-	6	7.6
Optician	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	1	-	1	1.2	1	-	1	1.3
Army	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	4	-	4	4.5	2	-	2	2.5
O.S. Surveyor	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	1	-	1	1.2	-	-	-	-
Sales	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	1	1	1.2	-	-	-	-
* Other Occupations	5	1	6	6	2	1	3	4.5	5	1	6	6.8	7	1	8	10.1
Totals	67	37	104	100	57	12	66	100	75	13	88	100	61	18	79	100
% of Irish-born workforce	64	36	-	100	83	17	-	100	85	15	-	100	77	23	-	100

\* For example, Pipe maker, Truck maker, dyer, Shoemaker, Weaver, Glazier, Mat maker, Malster

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.

Table 30: Profile of the occupations of the Irish in Holywell, 1851 to 1881.

Occupation	1851: 97 in 18 occupations				1861: 53 in 20 occupations				1871: 133 in 32 occupations				1881: 52 in 19 occupations			
	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%
Hawkers	25	16	41	43	7	3	10	19	24	13	37	28	2	1	3	6
Ag. Lab.	1	-	1	1	7	-	7	13	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Gen. Lab.	14	-	14	15	4	1	5	9	30	1	31	23.3	13	-	13	25
L.H.K / Innkeeper	-	3	3	3	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.75	2	2	4	7
Traveller	8	-	8	9	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	1.5	-	-	-	-
Servant	-	3	3	3	-	2	2	3.7	-	11	11	8.3	1	8	9	17
Housekeeper	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	1.5	-	-	-	-
Shoemaker	2	-	2	3	2	-	2	3.7	8	-	8	6	4	-	4	7
Rag Merchant	1	-	1	1	7	-	7	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dealer	5	-	5	5	1	-	1	2	3	-	3	2	2	1	3	6
Tin Plate Worker	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	2	4	-	4	3	-	-	-	-
Tailor	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Weaver	1	3	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sieve Maker	2	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Engineer	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hairdresser	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	2	1	-	1	0.75	1	-	1	2
Tanner	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Glazer	2	-	2	3	3	-	3	5.8	1	-	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Excise	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	1	-	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Quarryman / Collier	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	3.7	1	-	1	0.75	1	-	1	2
Dressmaker	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	3.7	-	2	2	1.5	-	1	1	2
Confectioner	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Milliner	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	3.7	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
Priest	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Sister of Charity	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dyer	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	3.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pipe Maker	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	1	-	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Clerk	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	1	-	1	0.75	1	-	1	2
Street Porter	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Figure Maker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Stays Maker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	1.5	-	-	-	-
Sailor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	1.5	-	-	-	-
Ostler / Gardner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	1.5	2	-	2	4
Apprentice	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	3	2	-	-	-	-
Laundress	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.75	-	1	1	2
Annuitant / Pensioner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	3	2	1	1	2	4
Umbrella Maker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.75	1	-	1	2
Musician	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	4	3	-	-	-	-
Rope Maker / Wire Drawer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.75	1	-	1	2
Cap Maker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Painter / Plumber	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.75	2	-	2	4
Poor Relief	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.75	-	-	-	-
Totals	66	31	97	100	40	13	53	100	97	36	133	100	36	16	52	100
% of Irish Workforce	68	32	-	100	75	25	-	100	73	27	-	100	69	31	-	100

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.

Table 31: Profile of the occupations of the Irish in Flint, 1851 to 1881.

Occupation	1851: 13 in 5 occupations				1861: 35 in 8 occupations				1871: 204 in 19 occupations				1881: 264 in 20 occupations			
	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%
Labourer	7	-	7	54	13	-	13	38	116	-	116	57	40	5	45	17
Weaver	1	-	1	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dealer	-	2	2	15	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Comm. Traveller	-	2	2	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.4
Plate Layer	1	-	1	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	0.7
Labourer (Chem.)	-	-	-	-	13	-	13	38	54	-	54	26	164	-	164	62.1
Cleaner	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	-	1	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Labourer (Agric)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Domestic Servant	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	6	-	11	11	5.5	2	13	15	5.7
Hawker	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	3	1	2	3	1.5	1	4	5	1.9
Laundress	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	-	1	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Vitriol Maker	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Housekeeper	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	1.5	-	-	-	-
Clergy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Chem. Manufacturer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	3	-	3	1.1
Gardner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	2	-	2	0.7
Plumber	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	1	-	-	-	-
L.H.K./Publican	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.5	3	1	4	1.5
Foreman	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	2	-	2	0.7
Dressmaker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	1.5	-	3	3	1.1
Ganger	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Policeman	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Chemist	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Miner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Coopers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	6	2.3
Craftsman's Assistants	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	3	1.1
Retailing (Grocery)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	1.1
Clerks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.4
Masons	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.4
Surveyors	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.4
Puddlers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.4
Compositors	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.4
Other Occupations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2
Parish Relief	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.4
Totals	9	4	13	100	30	5	35	100	182	22	204	100	264	30	264	100
% of Irish Workforce	69	31	-	100	86	14	-	100	89	11	-	100	89	11	-	100

Source: Census Enumerators' Returns, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.

## CHAPTER SIX

IRISH MOBILITY: IN/OUT MIGRATION

LODGERS & LODGING - HOUSES

David Fitzpatrick has called the Irish who came to Britain in the mid-nineteenth century 'a restless, transient people'.<sup>193</sup> If this were so, a high rate of mobility would be expected among them, including local and nation-wide movement and ranging in kind from the complete rootlessness of the vagrant to the pragmatic responses of those who followed work. Mobility, of course, was not the prerogative of the Irish. Britain in the nineteenth century was in a state of flux with its towns being swollen in an inrush of migrants from the countryside. This could be a local phenomenon with many incomers drawn from a town's immediate surroundings. For instance, over 40% of Preston's population in 1851 came from a ten-mile radius of the town and 30% from birthplaces only thirty miles away.<sup>194</sup> It was also migration over much larger distances as in the case of Middlesbrough whose rapid industrial growth sucked in people from all parts of Britain to such an extent that its population rose from 154 in 1831 to 55,934 in 1881.<sup>195</sup>

If moving one's family in the search for work was at the laudable end of the scale, out-and-out vagrancy was at the other extreme. Two items in the *Wrexham Advertiser* show the interest taken in the subjects of pauperism and vagrancy. First, the paper saw fit to report that the Chief Constable of Flintshire had written to the Board of Guardians at Holywell to caution them about the 'tramping locusts'. Magistrates, he felt, were too lenient in their treatment of vagrants. He ignored the fact that Mold Guardians had stopped giving relief and were sending vagrants on to Holywell, thereby increasing the latter town's expenditure.<sup>196</sup>

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193 D. Fitzpatrick in Swift and Gilley, (eds.), (1989), p.12.

194 See Chapter One, Note 45.

195 A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, (Penguin, 1968), pp. 242, 247.

196 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 21 October 1876.

Secondly, the *Advertiser*, in a piece about Irish paupers in Wales as a whole, reported that, on 1 July 1875, Glamorgan had 1,655 -the highest number in the country - and that, on 1 January 1875, Shropshire had 98 Irish adults and children, including twelve in workhouses, ten children in orphanages, nine in lunatic asylums, and 67 on outdoor relief. Mid-Shropshire, of course, was only one or two days' walk from Wrexham, a fact not unknown to the town's guardians. As it was on an established through-route for travellers, it could expect a steady flow of vagrants.

An appreciation of, (or belief in), migrant flow-paths was articulated, without equivocation, by the *Chester Chronicle*. On 12 January 1850, the claim was made that 'a swarming pauper tenancy ..... like an Irish bog ..... might suddenly slide along the soil.' This was followed, on 15 June, by undisguised bias in a piece headed, 'Irish Paupers':

The annual influx of Irish paupers has commenced at Liverpool, and Chester has already felt the inconvenience in this respect of its contiguity to that great place of debarkation of the want, filth, disease and riotous indulgence for which the unwelcome visitors are unhappily notorious

This same issue of 15 June 1850 laid the blame for 'the annual influx' upon the Irish land clearance system, the reluctance to enter Irish union workhouses and the low rate of fare from Ireland. 'Eight Irish steamers were constantly bringing over paupers at 6d. per head and charging 5s. for their return.' But underpinning these 'causes' of Irish migration was the 'rambling disposition of the people.'

Such may have been the experience of Denbigh in the Vale of Clwyd. Denbigh Police Station kept a record of persons receiving relief, that is, accommodation in the police station for one or two nights, for the years 1868 to



1875. The 'Observations' column in the log book contains such remarks as 'tramp', 'seeking work', 'seeking husband'; it also has 'making (for) home' - in Ireland. From 1872 to 1875, 532 people were given relief, of whom 81 were Irish-born, or 15.2%.<sup>197</sup>

Table 32: The Irish-born relieved at Denbigh police station, 1872 -1875.

Year	Westbound	Eastbound	Southbound	Northbound	Total
1872	4	3	5	2	14
1873	10	2	4	1	17
1874	11	3	6	1	21
1875	13	9	6	1	29
Totals	38	17	21	5	81

198

Source: County Record Office, Ruthin.

The relief book shows that from 1868 to 1871, a total of 3,247 itinerants were accommodated. In the years from 1871 to 1875, between 16% and 19% were Irish-born. In 1871, they were mainly labourers, but in later years they included tailors and tanners, glaziers and gilders, shoemakers and coopers. And, because of the rather quirky convention of recording heights, we know that, in 1875, 6'3" Thomas Sutton, a 32-year old Irish-born labourer, asked for a night's lodging - surely a giant in those days when, according to the Denbigh police records, the average height of those over 26 years was 5'5¼". The record also shows that most travellers were male, but that twelve single women applied for relief. Such records, in themselves, are not substantial enough to permit generalisations to be made, but can provide a

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197 County Record Office, Ruthin, DD/DM/551/1, Denbigh Police Station Relief Book, 1872 – 75.  
198 Source, *ibid*.

glimpse of a 'restless, transient people': Denbigh Police station was a checkpoint on their journey.

The main concern here is not with the inveterate transients, but with those Irish who were short-term residents and those more settled in the four towns of this study. TABLE 32 and FIGURE 14 show that, with one exception, there was an ebb and flow of the Irish-born in and out of the towns over the four census enumerations. In Mold and Holywell there was a decline in the Irish-born populations, in Wrexham an overall increase, but a decline from a peak in 1871. Flint was the exception with a hiatus between 1851 and 1861 succeeded by a sharp rise in the following decade.

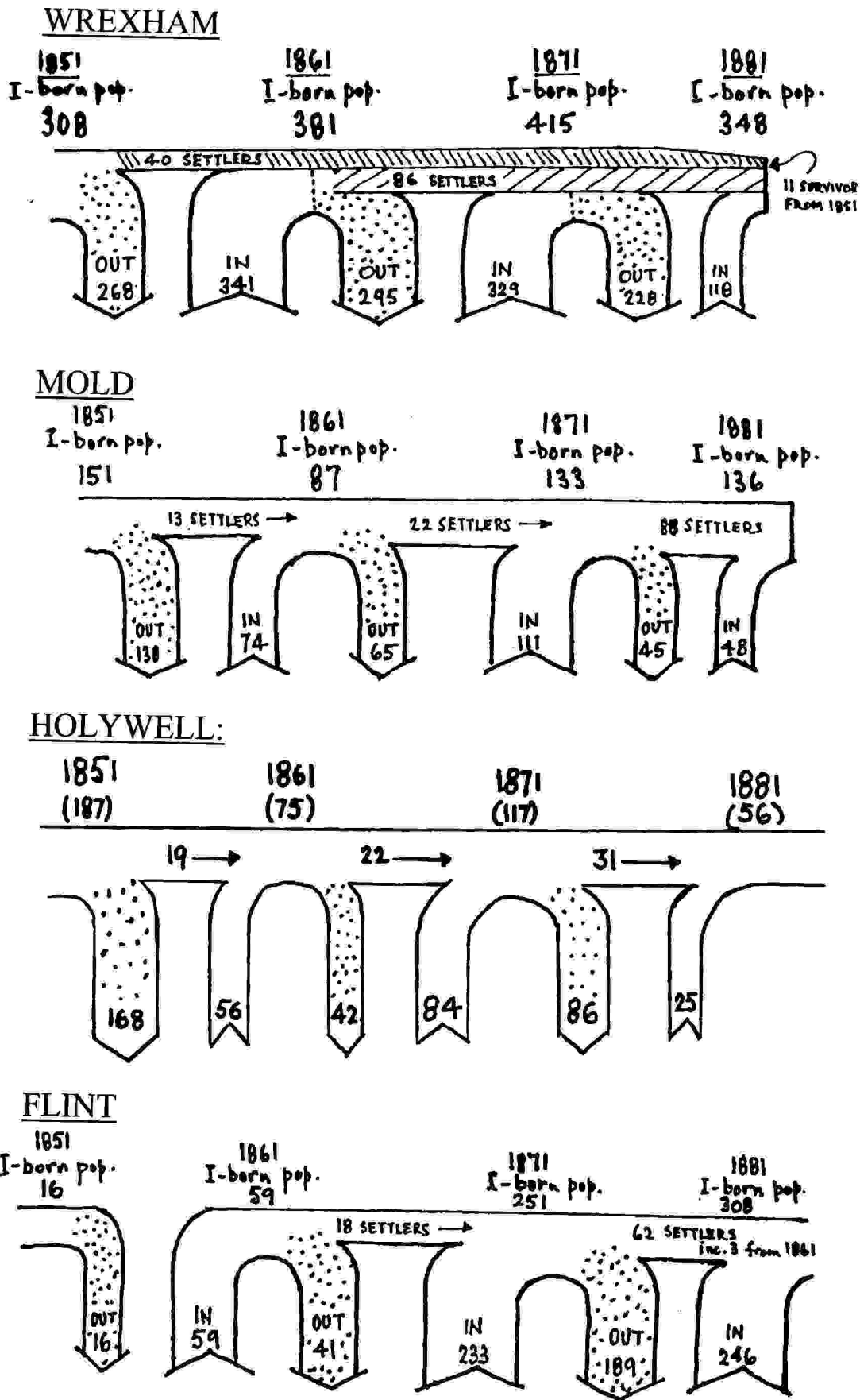
Table 33: Out - and in - migration of Irish-born in Wrexham, Mold, Holywell and Flint, 1851 to 1881.

	1851	OUT	IN		1861	OUT	IN		1871	OUT	IN		1881
WREXHAM	308	-268	+341	=	381	-295	+329	=	415	-228	+118	=	348
MOLD	151	-138	+74	=	87	-65	+111	=	133	-45	+48	=	136
HOLYWELL	187	-168	+56	=	75	-42	+84	=	117	-86	+25	=	56
FLINT	16	-16	+59	=	59	-41	+233	=	251	-189	+246	=	308

Source: Census Enumerations, 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881

SEE ALSO FIGURE 14

FIGURE 14: The changes in the Irish – born populations of four North-East Wales towns, 1851 – 1881.



Source: Census Enumerations, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.

TABLE 33 summarises the volume of migration on four occasions ten years apart, It says nothing about the paths followed by the migrants or of the rates of mobility and settlement to be found among their ranks. From census returns it can be seen that there were connections between places of origin in Ireland and particular towns; for instance, between Connacht and Leinster and Wrexham. Such connections had much to do with chain migration, but were not unrelated to the proximity of the Irish areas to the Dublin ferries: the shortest distance between two points. To land in Liverpool meant a longer and more expensive sea trip, but a more established Irish community from which to draw succour; to land at Holyhead meant a slog along the level coastal road, plus the possibility of work en route in an agricultural landscape in, say, the Vale of Clwyd, or through the mountains along the Telford - pioneered route to Llangollen, then north to Wrexham and South Lancashire, or south to the Midlands. Both would have had their attractions.

In Wrexham, the evidence of birthplace as given in census returns suggests a measure of affinity between the town and Connacht. The counties of Mayo, Sligo, Galway and Roscommon have frequent mentions. To take one street as an example, of the 53 Irish-born in Mount Street in 1851, 45, or 85%, came from that area of Connacht, the remaining eight from Dublin. In 1861, the Connacht connection supplied 53 of the 73 Irish in Mount Street, or 73%; the remainder came from Cavan, Dublin, Belfast, Waterford, Wexford and Cork. This was echoed in other parts of Wrexham where the Irish were to be found.

From census entries it is evident that a similar geographical link existed with Mold. The 1871 census - the most detailed - listed places of origin such as Galway, Westport, Foxford, Carlow, Dungannon and Kilkenny. Connacht and Leinster were

the original provinces of most Irish in Mold at this time, but Ulster was mentioned occasionally. This Ulster connection was more evident in Holywell where there was a textile industry still surviving. Ulster people, of course, had a tradition of linen-making. In 1851, 'Ireland' was the place most often entered for Holywell's 187 Irish-born, but 24 came from Counties Down and Antrim. Mayo, Sligo and Galway contributed 26, Dublin and Wicklow five and Cork two. In short, of the town's Irish, Connacht provided 14%, Ulster 13%, Leinster 2.7% and Munster 1.1%; the remaining 68% simply came from 'Ireland'. By 1861, the Ulster-born represented 3% of Holywell's Irish; by 1871, 5% and, by 1881, 11%. In Flint, however, with its later development, the largest supplier of Irish-born population was not Connacht: it had been overtaken by Leinster. In 1871 - by which time there had developed a 'visible' Irish presence in Flint - one-third of the town's Irish were given as merely 'Ireland-born'; of the remainder, 45.4% came from Connacht, 10% from Munster and 6% from Ulster.

Few of the Irish in the four towns were newly-minted migrants: they did not arrive from Ireland direct, but came via other parts of Britain and elsewhere. This was particularly so in Flint, whose Irish arrived, almost en masse, in the 1860s. But where had their migrations taken them? A partial insight lies in the birthplaces of their children.

In Wrexham, in 1851, there were 103 children of Irish-born parents. Seventy-six of these were listed as born in Ireland, sixteen in Connacht and five in Munster. Twenty were born in Wrexham itself, or 19.4%; five in nearby counties (Lancashire, Cheshire, Shropshire, Flintshire) and one in Somerset. One was born overseas in Jamaica. Thus, 74% were themselves Irish-born, 19% Wrexham-born.

By 1861, 20% of the town's total of 359 children of Irish-born parents were born in Ireland and 80% in Britain, 63% in Wrexham itself. Eight percent of the children were born in neighbouring counties and in nearby Lancashire, three percent in Birmingham and the West Midlands. A few came from Hereford and Monmouthshire, and one from Chichester. By 1871, the percentage of Irish-born children had fallen to 17%, while the Wrexham-born had risen to 70%. These figures had changed by 1881, with Irish-born children comprising only 6% of the total of 335. Wrexham was the birthplace of 87% of its children of Irish-born parents: the migrants were settling down, their days of meandering over. At the birth of their children, they were increasingly less likely to be in Ireland than in Wrexham. The hinterland of Liverpool - Lancashire and Cheshire - was often the place where they were to be found, especially in 1861 and 1871, but they were attracted to Wrexham from places further a field, such as the Midlands, Staffordshire, Yorkshire, the South of England and South Wales.<sup>199</sup> Figures 15 and 16 plot the places of origin for a single street in Wrexham in 1851 and 1861. The samples are small, 27 and 64, but sufficient to show the continuity of South Lancashire and Cheshire as the main 'supplier' of children - with the Midlands in second place - and the change in importance between North and South Wales. J.G. Williamson has posited that as the century progressed there was a drift of the Irish from the large urban areas and ports of entry to the smaller inland towns such as those of Lancashire and Cheshire before they merged into a conurbation.<sup>200</sup> The evidence of Mount Street, Wrexham, would seem to corroborate this.

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199 See D. M. MacRaid, (1998), Table 2.6, p.45. The percentage of Irish-born children of Irish-born parents in Workington fell from 61.5% in 1851 to 24.6% in 1871, with a corresponding rise in Workington-born children.

200 J.G. Williamson, *The Impact of the Irish on British labour markets during the industrial revolution* in Swift and Gilley (1989), p.140.

FIGURE 15:

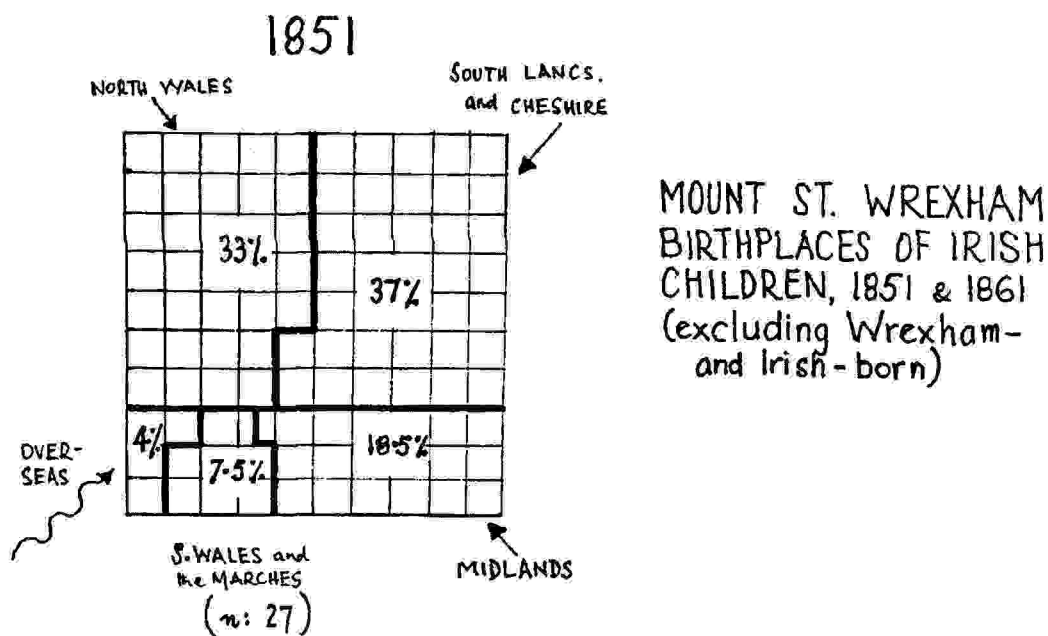
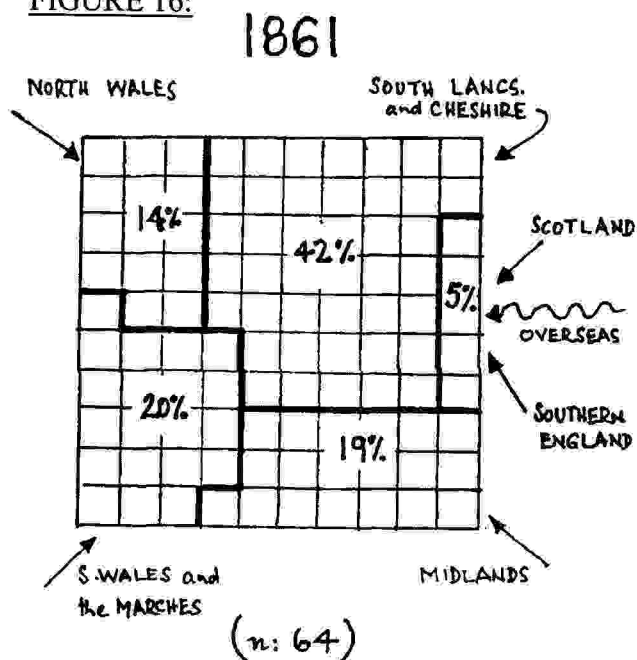


FIGURE 16:



Source: Census Enumerations, 1851 and 1861.

The picture in Mold was similar, with a decline in the numbers of Irish-born children and a corresponding increase of those born in Mold. From 1851 to 1881, the children of Irish-born parents numbered in, successive enumerations, 57, 56, 22 and 96. The percentages of Irish-born children fell from 60% in 1851 to 4% in 1881; likewise, the percentages of those Mold-born rose from 40% to 82%. These rises and falls were not steady however, for there was a plateau between 1861 and 1871:

	1851	1861	1871	1881
Irish-born	60%	27%	27%	4%
Mold-born	40%	64%	59%	82%

Information on the place of origin was not recorded in detail in 1851, but, in 1861, Lancashire and Staffordshire were seen to be the birthplaces of 7.2% of the children, with 3.6% each. The North of England - Newcastle, Clitheroe, for instance, - contributed almost 2%. In 1871, Dublin was given as the birthplace of 4.5% of the children, with Lancashire on a par, but the overall numbers - 22 - were small. By 1881, the part played by Lancashire, Staffordshire and the West Midlands had diminished to between 1% and 2%, while that of the local area (Wrexham and Chester) had grown to 11%.

In Holywell, the decline in the numbers of children of Irish-born parents was more rapid: by 1881, there were none. In 1851, 36% of the children were born in Ireland; in 1861, 19% and by 1871, 9%. Holywell's count rose from 41% in 1851, through 64% and 72% in 1861 and 1871, to 81% in 1881. One couple who, in 1871, had a child enumerated in the 150 Holywell-born children of Irish parents had other children born in Bolton, High Bentham (northeast of Lancaster), Fleetwood and Wigan. Those children represented the family's first phase of migration within a



locality. The second phase was marked by the birth of a fifth child in Shropshire and a sixth in Holywell. TABLE 34 shows the geographical distribution of the birthplaces.

*Table 34: Birthplaces of children of Irish-born parents in Holywell, 1851 to 1881, by percentage.*

Birthplace	1851 (Total 92)	1861 (Total 64)	1871 (Total 150)	1881 (Total 74)
Ireland	37%	19%	9%	-
Holywell	41%	64%	72%	81%
Liverpool	2%	3%	-	3%
N. England/Scotland	3%	5%	1%	1%
Midlands	3%	3%	-	1%
Lancs./Cheshire	-	-	8%	1%
Mold/N.E.Wales	1%	6%	4%	1%
Shropshire	-	-	1%	-
Staffordshire	-	-	1%	-
South Wales	-	-	1%	4%
South of England	-	-	1%	4%

*Source: Census Returns, 1851 to 1881*

The rise and fall of the numbers of children (92 - 64 - 150 - 74) matched the numbers of Irish-born in the town (See TABLE 34), the year 1861 the lowest probably because of the decline of industry in the Greenfield Valley, to be followed by a recovery in 1871. On the evidence of these birthplaces, it seems that, after Ireland and the town itself, North-East Wales was the area that featured most in the Irish migrations. The North of England and Scotland came second, followed closely by nearby Lancashire and Cheshire. Holywell's Irish were not especially nomadic. Those of Flint were more so. Places like Northamptonshire and Northumberland, as well as Aldershot, Scotland and overseas, appeared more frequently in the census

returns as the birthplaces of their children. The percentage of Flint - and Flintshire-born children of Irish-born parents was falling until 1871: 71% in 1851; 49% in 1861; 59% in 1871; 67% in 1881. Irish-born children rose in percentage from 1851 to 1881: 5% - 13% - 14% - 20%. Once again, Flint did not precisely fit the pattern of the locality. However, Lancashire and Cheshire provided 22% to 23% of the children of the Irish-born in 1861 and 1871 and continued with 8% in 1881. Families within 20 to 30 miles moved to exploit sudden demands for labour such as needed in the 1860s in Flint. For example, in 1871 at No. 17, Castle Street, parents born in Ireland had children born in Tarvin, Saltney, Chester and in Flint itself, that is, all within 25 miles. Another house with its eleven residents had Irish-born parents with their three children born in North-East Wales, two born in Lancashire, together with relatives born in Flintshire and Liverpool. On the other hand, whatever longer distances Flint's Irish travelled, family connections played a part in their motivation and choice of destination. In 1881, for instance, Queen Street's 17% Irish-born came from only 25 people and of these, 17, or 68%, hailed from Clontibret in County Monaghan. Chain migration was operating in more than one house in Queen Street: the Mulligan family, occupying two houses, had nine members, plus five lodgers, all fourteen born in Clontibret. Furthermore, the McMahons - Bernard, his wife, Bridget, and their son, James - also were born in Clontibret and they had two cousins from County Monaghan visiting at the time of the census. There was, therefore, in 1881, a distinct connection between Clontibret and Queen Street, Flint, a connection generated by but two families.

Nevertheless, despite an appearance of greater mobility among the Irish in Flint, their movements carried echoes of the town's general pattern of migration. Forty percent of the Irish children in 1881 had been born elsewhere than in Flint and

60% in Flint itself. Of those born away from Flint, 93% had been born in Lancashire, Cheshire, Merseyside and Flintshire. The census listed 170 different birthplaces for the inhabitants of Flint, 79% of which were within ten miles of the town: 60% in the town itself, 6% within two miles, 17% between two and four miles, 9% between four and ten miles and 7.5% beyond.

From their origins in Ireland, some of the 'restless, transient people' travelled around Britain to be found, at the end of the period under study, in four towns in North-East Wales. The tendency to settle grew as the years moved on, so that Wrexham and Mold progressively lost fewer of their previous decades' Irish-born inhabitants. From 1851 to 1861, Wrexham lost 87% of its Irish-born; from 1861 to 1871, 77% and from 1871 to 1881, 54%. Replacements exceeded losses until 1871 and overall numbers were higher in 1881 than they were thirty years previously. In Mold, the losses from 1851 to 1861 were 91%, but this figure diminished to 74% by 1871 and to 39% by 1881. Here, overall numbers were lower than in 1851. Holywell lost 90% of its Irish-born between 1851 and 1861 and 56% between 1861 and 1871; thereafter - unlike the trend in Wrexham and Mold - the loss was greater, 73%, the numbers having fallen to 56. The situation in Flint was most volatile. By 1861, all 16 of its Irish-born had moved on: 100% loss. Fifty-nine others reached the town but 69% of them had moved on by 1871. A fresh cohort arrived, but, by 1881, 75% of the town's 1871 total had migrated. The rates of settlement in Wrexham and Mold increased over the period, but those in Holywell and Flint decreased. The economies of Wrexham and Mold were not so monolithic as those of Holywell and Flint and, through diversity, offered more stability to the labour force. Flint, in particular, attracted the mobile Irish: from the mid -1860s to 1881, hundreds arrived

and hundreds departed. The birthplaces of their children plot the course of their wanderings.

But was mobility a feature of all Irish? Were migration and settlement affected by, say, age and sex? To take but two towns - Mold and Flint - different in size, growth and character. In Mold, in 1861, for instance, of the 13 who stayed on to 1881, ten were married (five of each sex) and three single or widowed. Their ages ranged from 21 to 56, with an average of 35.7 years. Maturity with its attendant trappings - family, employment, perhaps property - could have encouraged settlement. Flint, on the other hand, with its more volatile population, had seven Irish who stayed on to 1881 and three who were still there in 1871, with ages ranging between 30 and 42 years and averaging 32 years. These numbers are too small to underpin any valid conclusions; besides, reason for moving or staying cannot be ascertained from plain census statistics - obligations elsewhere, changing family needs or even a 'culture of migration'<sup>201</sup> can all come into it.

Was there a greater tendency to change among certain occupational groups? In Wrexham, of the fifteen employed adult Irish males who were enumerated in only one census, in 1851, two were in Occupational Class III, nine in Class IV, three in Class V and one in Class VI. This means that Class IV had 60% and Class V 20% of the total numbers; Class III had only 13%. By 1861 to 1871, numbers had increased to 62. Eight, or 13%, of these were in Class III; 29, or 46%, in Class IV, and 25, or 40%, in Class V. Numbers had fallen by 1881 with five of the 31 total Irish employed, or 16%, in Class III; seven, or 23%, in class IV and nineteen, or

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201 See P. Panayi, (1994), p.35, op. cit. (Chapter One, Note 66).

16%, in Class V. FIGURE 17 shows the movement, by percentage, of each occupational class. After 1861, Class III maintained its percentage of the total male Irish workforce, whereas that of Class IV diminished by 14%; Class V increased by 20%. After 1871, 3% more of Class III were in evidence while Class IV was halved. The largest increase was in Class V, from 40% to 61%. Even from these numbers - and bearing in mind that the higher the percentage, the less the likelihood of mobility in a class - it may be seen that Class III maintained its presence in the town while Class IV saw it more and more necessary to move on. The members of Class V, the unskilled, were the least mobile. The relationship between the percentages of Classes IV and V reversed as the period progressed, from 60%: 23% to 20%: 61%. Those with skills - Class III - tended to stay. Those in business, such as Patrick McDermott, the marine store dealer, had premises which needed his constant attention; those with a skill, such as James Trainer, the baker of Brook Street, had a clientele who needed his services. Again, those without a skill - Class V - would perhaps see little employment benefit in moving from one labouring job to another in another town. Class IV - those with some skills, limited but transferable - would be the most mobile. The experience of Wrexham's Irish males would seem to reflect this.

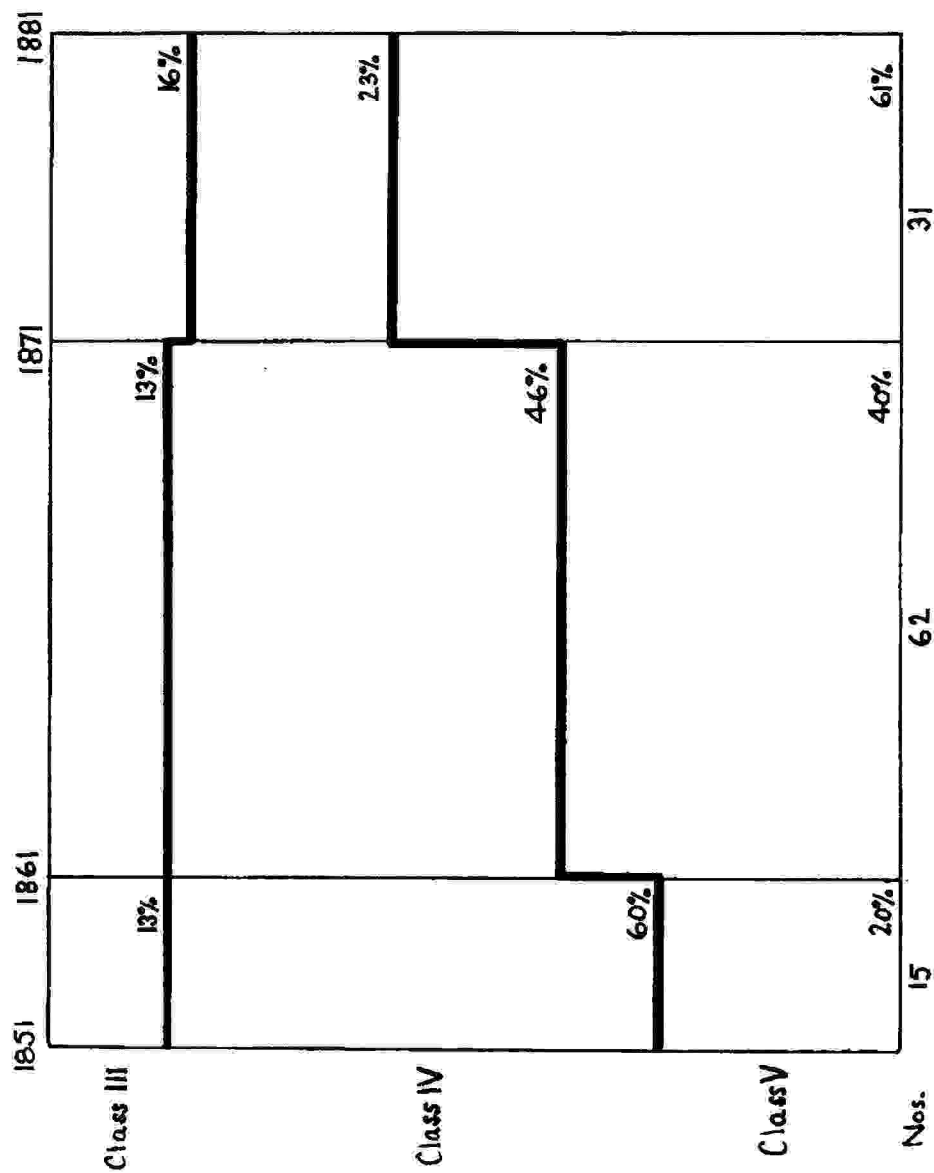
The situation in Mold was similar but with a greater range. Class III between 1851 and 1871 increased its mobility, but then, from 1871 to 1881, began to increase in the town. Over the thirty years, Class III represented 22%, 9% and 16% of the Irish workforce. Class V, on the other hand, increased from 35% to 82%. In between, Class IV saw a dramatic reduction from 43% to a near extinction of 2% (See FIGURE 18) Such extinction of Class IV was achieved in Holywell from 1871 to 1881. Here, the class experienced sudden changes of fortune, moving from 7% of

the Irish workforce in the 1850s, to 32% in the 1960s, total disappearance in the 1870s to a small re-emergence of 4% in 1881. The other classes had correspondingly less volatility: Class III, in the 1850s, 32% and, in the 1870s, 37.5%; Class V, 61% and 56%. Both III and V in the 1860s fitted around Class IV with 18% and 47%. (See FIGURE 19) However, the 1861 census in Holywell was less than perfect (See Chapter 3) so that the classification of occupations in the town must be viewed with care. Nevertheless, Holywell was a town in slow decline with Flint, a few miles away, in the ascendant, holding out greater prospects of work. Another factor must be borne in mind: 'mobility' can include besides movement to and from a town - transfer to another class, abandonment of employment altogether and, of course, death. Examples of movement between occupational classes occurred in Holywell. From 1851 to 1861, three Irish males stayed in the same class but two moved from Class V to Class IV and one from III to V; from 1861 to 1871, two moved from Class IV to V.

In short, the greatest mobility in the occupational classes of the Irish males was to be found in Class IV, the semi-skilled. In Wrexham, the class dwindled - that is, was more mobile - in the ratio of 3:2:1 over the thirty-year period; in Mold, it had all but disappeared by 1871, a time when, in Holywell, it had. The situation in Flint, with its own pattern of later development was very different from those in the other towns. 1851 was the year when Flint had the most even distribution of its male adult Irish workforce: 17%, 17% and 66% in Classes III, IV and V respectively. (See FIGURE 20) However, the numbers were so small - six in all - that little use can be made of them. By 1861, numbers had increased to twenty-five with a division between Classes IV and V of 12% and 88%; there were no Irish males in Class III. All classes except II were present by 1871. Class I represented 20% of the Irish

workforce, Class III - reappearing after the 1860s - represented 3%. Classes IV and VI were 1% each, but the great majority, 93%, were in Class V. This dominance of Class V was to continue beyond 1881 with 1.5% in Class I, 7% in Class III, 2.5% in Class IV and 89% in Class V. Flint had no Irish males in Class II during the period. As far as the Irish were concerned, Flint from 1861 to 1881 was a pioneer town, in the main requiring unskilled labour. The skilled and managerial classes began to emerge among the Irish from 1881 onwards, by which time the Muspratt chemical works which had sparked the influx of Irish labour had established its supervisory structure.

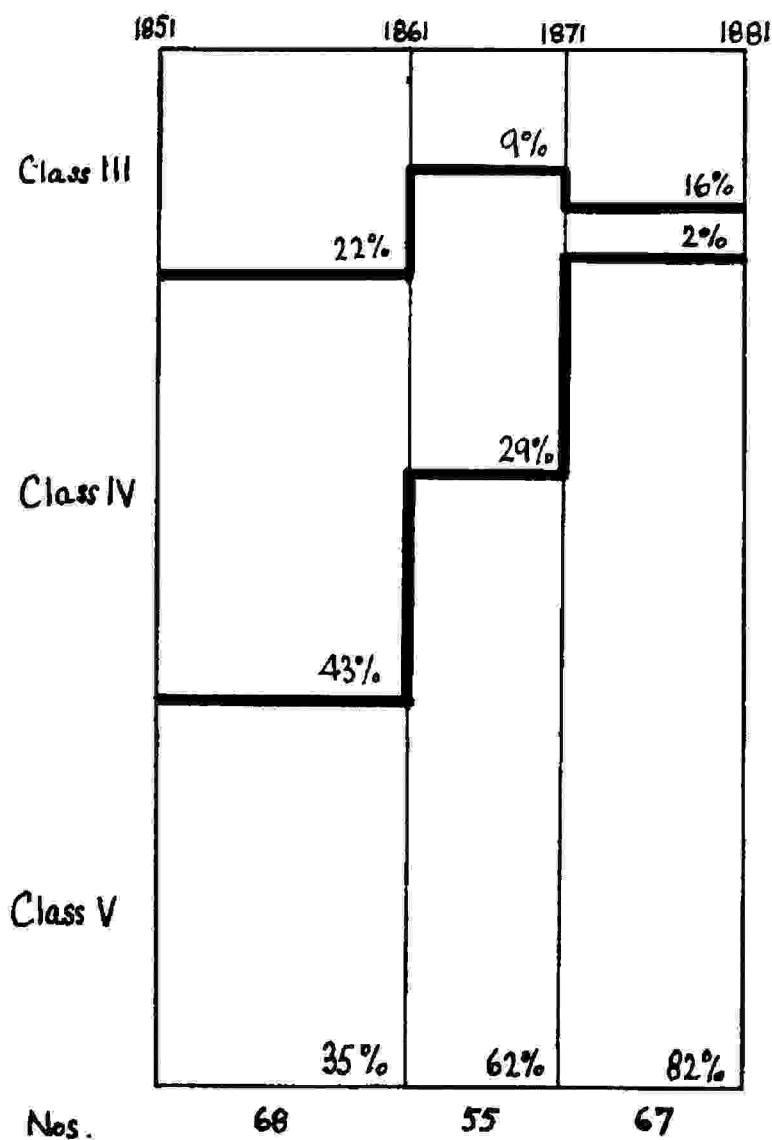
FIGURE 17: Relationship Between Occupational Class and Mobility Among Irish Males in Wrexham, 1851 – 1881.



PERSONS INCLUDED: Irish Males over 18 years in employment at time of census.  
Source: *Census Returns, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.*

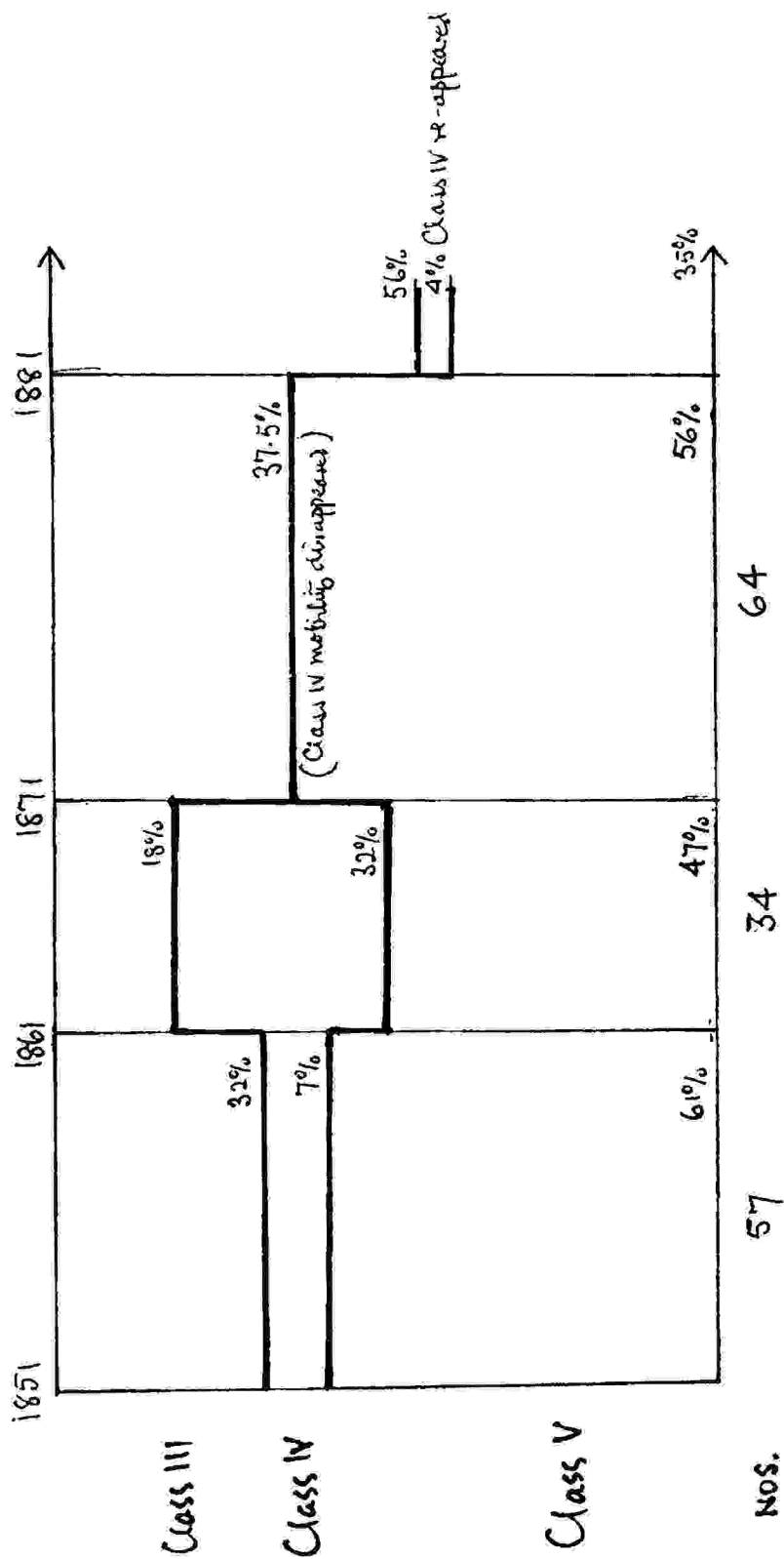


FIGURE 18: Relationship Between Occupational Class and Mobility Among Irish Males in Mold, 1851 – 1881.



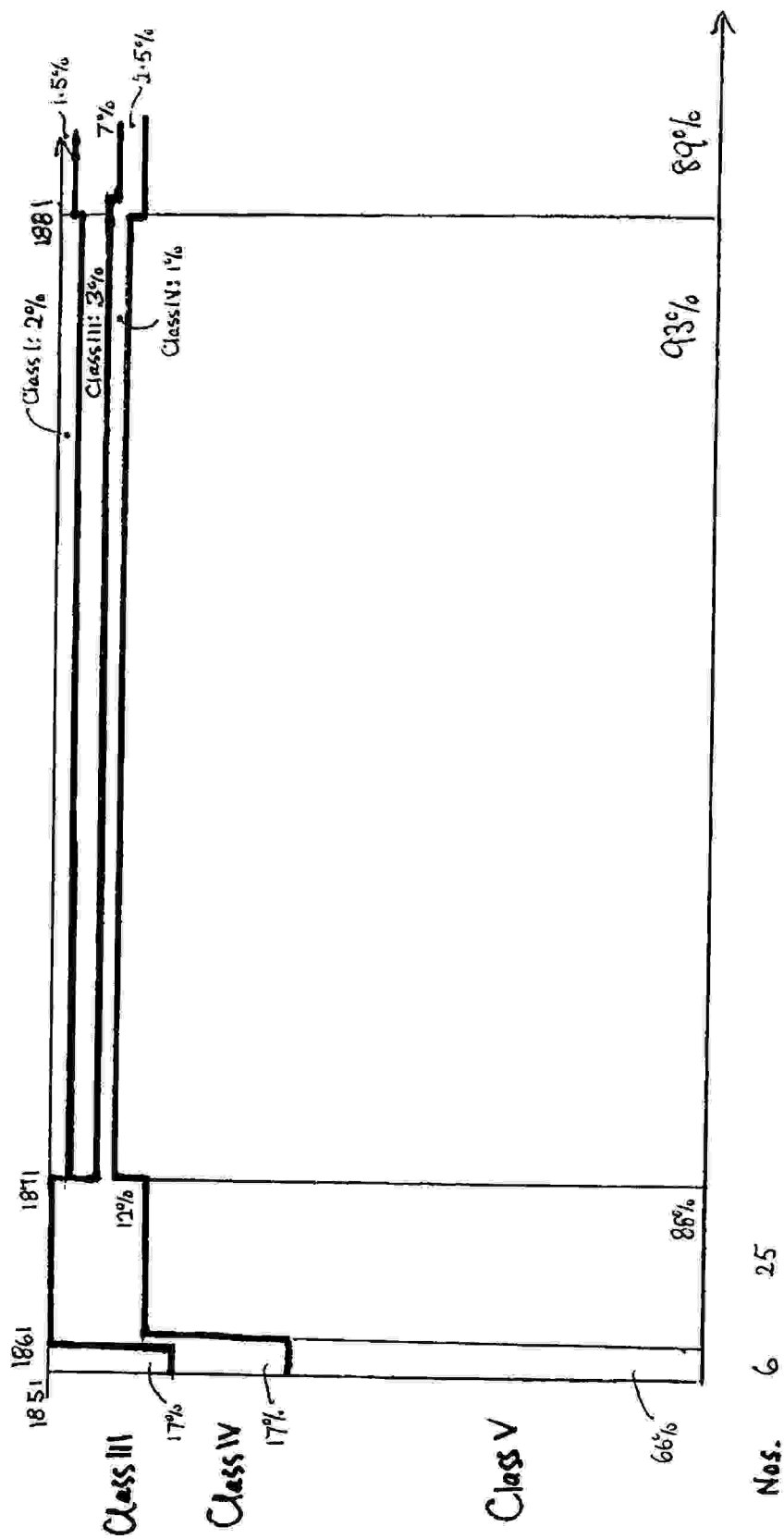
PERSONS INCLUDED: Irish males over 18 years in employment at time of census.  
Source: Census Returns, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.

FIGURE 19: Relationship Between Occupational Class and Mobility Among Irish Males in Holywell, 1851 – 1881.



PERSONS INCLUDED: Irish Males over 18 years in employment at time of census.  
Source: *Census Returns, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.*

FIGURE 20: Relationship Between Occupational Class and Mobility Among Irish Males in Flint, 1851 – 1881.



PERSONS INCLUDED: Irish Males over 18 years in employment at time of census.  
Source: Census Returns, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LODGERS IN IRISH HOUSES

With mobility as a prominent feature of Irish experience in nineteenth-century Britain, it could be profitable to pay closer attention to that personification of impermanence, the lodger.

The lodger could not perhaps be seen as one expected to contribute much to the growth of civic identity, but could, on the other hand, strengthen the development of a group feeling among a sub-community. A flow of Irish lodgers through a street could, for their compatriots, stimulate a renewal of old bonds and values that sprang from the earlier days of the diaspora and revive a sense of identity.

The Irish were poor and took in lodgers: both parties benefited, in income supplement and in cheap housing. In 1851, the average number of people per house in England and Wales was 5.5, but among the Irish in Lancashire, with its large urban population and high percentage of Irish fleeing the Great Famine, the average was 5.8.<sup>202</sup> The Irish, as a rule, had more lodgers than their non-Irish neighbours. 'The presence of lodgers ..... was a structural part of Lancashire urban life'<sup>203</sup> and the percentage of households with lodgers in the county in the years from 1851 to 1871 was higher by as much as 6.2% to 9.7% in Irish households than in non-Irish households.<sup>204</sup> These numbers, however, were exceeded by those in certain places in Cumbria; for instance, in Cleator Moor in 1851 the average number per Irish-headed household was 9.9 compared to the town's average of 7.1. In Whitehaven, in 1871, the number was six compared to 4.8 per house.<sup>205</sup>

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202 W.J.Lowe, (1989), *op. cit.*, p.60, Table 10.

203 *ibid.*, p.58.

204 *ibid.*, p.58, Table 8.

205 MacRaild, (1998), *op. cit.*, p.54, Table 2.9.

How far Irish lodgers encouraged Irish isolation within the general community, or how much they contributed to cohesive Irish networks is a matter for conjecture. Whatever was accorded the transients - welcome or rejection - their short-lived presence had an effect on housing conditions, family economics and, very likely, on public perception of the Irish. Bulleys Yard in Mold in 1851 was a case in point: the Yard was an enclave within an enclave, forming an Irish core in an Irish cluster.

#### LODGERS IN BULLEYS YARD, MOLD, 1851

On 30-31 March 1851, there were 112 inhabitants in Bulleys Yard. Of this total, 82 (73.2%) had been born in Ireland and of the 112, twenty-five were Irish-born lodgers, or 22.3%. Furthermore, these 25 Irish-born lodgers represented 30.5% of the Yard's 82 Irish-born population. Looked at another way, it could be said that the Yard's Irish-born complement consisted of 57 more or less 'permanent' Irish and 25 transitory Irish. The presence of Irish-born lodgers could therefore have had a distinct effect upon the character of the Yard, boosting the percentage of the Irish-born within its confines from a 'permanent' 50.8% to 73.2%. (TABLE 35)

Table 35: Irish-born lodgers in Mold 1851 – 1881.

	1851						1861						1871						1881					
	Total St. Population	Irish-born Lodgers	% Irish-born Lodgers	Irish-born St. Population	% Irish-born Lodgers	% 'Permanent' Irish-born in Street †	Total St. Population	Irish-born Lodgers	% Irish-born Lodgers	Irish-born St. Population	% Irish-born Lodgers	% 'Permanent' Irish-born in Street †	Total St. Population	Irish-born Lodgers	% Irish-born Lodgers	Irish-born St. Population	% Irish-born Lodgers	% 'Permanent' Irish-born in Street †	Total St. Population	Irish-born Lodgers	% Irish-born Lodgers	Irish-born St. Population	% Irish-born Lodgers	% 'Permanent' Irish-born in Street †
Bulleys Yard	112	25	53.3 %	82	30.5 %	50.5 %	*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Henffordd	118	8	6.8 %	40	20 %	27.1 %							141	3	2.1%	24	12.5 %	14.8 %	151	7	4.6 %	28	25 %	13.9 %
Milford Street	359	9	2.5 %	32	28.1 %	6.4 %	493	23	4.66 %	82	28 %	11.9 %	340	9	2.6%	47	19.1 %	11.1 %	301	7	2.3 %	51	13.7 %	14.6 %
Henffordd and Milford St.	477	17	3.56 %	72	15.1 %	11.5 %							481	12	2.5%	71	16.9 %	12.2 %	452	14	3.1 %	79	8.9 %	14.3 %
3 Streets Combined	589	42	7.1 %	154	26.1 %	19 %																		

\* BULLEYS YARD NOT ENUMERATED AS SEPARATE AREA AFTER 1851

† SEE TEXT

Source: Census returns 1851 - 1881

To the 25 Irish-born lodgers should be added four others born in England, Scotland and Wales, the total 29 having an average age of 33.7 years (males: 36.2 years; females: 18.9 years). If one excludes two under ten years of age, the Yard's single female lodgers had an average age of 21.7 years, the males 27.9 years. They were accommodated in eight households, that is, 3.6 in each, but in the 'declared' lodging houses there was an average of three per house. The house with the most lodgers was Number 13 with eight - six males and two females, or 80%. The youngest male lodger was Scotland-born and fourteen years old; the oldest, Irish-born Patrick Caperly, a widower and pauper agricultural labourer, aged 84 years. The youngest female lodgers were five-year old Elizabeth May, born in Flint, and ten-year old Bridget Percy, born in Ireland; the oldest female was 35 years, the wife of William Percy, both Irish-born. Among the males, the occupation of labourer was the largest category, 13 out of 29; among the females, that of hawker, seven out of 29. Three declared themselves paupers, all male, and one claimed to be a shoemaker and another a dyer. As for marital status, the fifteen single males formed the largest group, with single females following with seven. There were two married males and two married females. Three males were widowed.

In Mold at least, the lodger seemed to have little importance beyond help with the rent. Few, if any, went on to become heads of their own households with families and lodgers of their own. However, the lodger did add to the total of Irish in the town and in doing so must have contributed to the townspeople's perception of the Irish in their midst.

## LODGERS AND LODGING – HOUSES IN WREXHAM

Hitherto, in attempting to give a normal picture of Wrexham's population, effort has been made to distinguish between permanent residents, long-term lodgers and those in town for a specific but temporary reason, that is, the town's annual fair. However, in considering the place of lodgers and lodging-houses in Wrexham society, this section has included in its nets all lodgers - Irish-born and those born elsewhere, street vendor, strolling players and others merely passing through. These were the people who would have revealed the location and role of the lodging - houses and demonstrated the importance of the lodger to the Irish householder.

On 30 March 1851, in Wrexham town centre, where most Irish lived, there were 170 lodgers - 103 males and 67 females - in 35 houses in 14 streets. This was an average of 4.8 per house. Mount Street had the greatest concentration of lodgers - 67 in all, representing 18% of the street's population of 374 - and indeed contained the house with the highest number. This was Number 1 with its 25 lodgers. Next door at Number 2, there were 17 lodgers, so that adjoining houses had 42 lodgers living with 12 family members; this made 54 occupants in all, of whom 22, or 41%, were Irish-born. Yorkshire Square, leading off Mount Street, had a total of 34 lodgers in six houses, or 5.6 per house on average. These six houses accommodated 64 people of whom 50 were Irish-born, or 78%, although it should be noted that the percentage range of Irish-born per house went from 40% to 100%. Brook Street, a hundred yards away, had 32 lodgers in five houses. Other houses with high numbers of lodgers were number 106, Tuttle Street, with 13, and number 191, Seven-Bridge Street with ten.



It is noteworthy that the nine officially-designated lodging-houses had fewer lodgers than the private addresses. Number 138, Yorke Street, for instance, had six out of a total occupancy of 27; Number 142, Beast Market, two out of eight and Number 45, Brook Street, eight out of fifteen. Number 48, Brook Street had seven out of fourteen. Cost and official inspections may have been factors in this. In 1845, the Health of Towns' Commission had investigated the town's lodging-houses, establishments which at various times supported between 3% and 6% of Wrexham's Irish-born community and accommodated a significant changing population of Irish. The picture was not one of godly cleanliness although not all the blame could be laid at Irish doors. The local police, part of whose duties it was to inspect lodging-houses, were consulted and Superintendent E. Griffiths reported that he had known as many as two hundred extra lodgers taken into forty houses already crowded and without suitable accommodation, 'as many as twelve dogs in one house'<sup>206</sup> In all, nine lodging-houses were listed in the census returns, accommodating 51 lodgers - 5.6 on average per house and a total occupancy, with family members, of 95, of whom 62 were Irish-born.

By 1861, the number of lodgers in the town centre had reduced by 33% from their 1851 level. The date of the census enumeration was a week later this year so that there may have been a movement of temporary residents out of town in the closing days of the annual fair. There were 115 lodgers recorded in 25 houses, giving an average of 4.5 per house, a figure not very different from that of 1851. There appeared to be only one recognised lodging-house, 33, Tuttle Street, where

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206 Second Report of the Health of Towns' Commission (1845), Vol. 1, para. 72.

fifteen lodgers resided, including eight Irish-born. However, as in 1851, the largest concentration was to be found in Mount Street, in four of whose houses forty lodgers were accommodated out of a total occupancy of 53. Three-quarters of those in the four houses were temporary, only nine of these lodgers were Irish-born, a large reduction since 1851.

The reduction in the number of lodgers continued into 1871. In that year's census count there were 61 Irish-born lodgers, 57 males and four females, representing 31% of the 195 Irish-born workers in the town. Most were labourers and hawkers, but approximately 16% of the males in lodgings were artisans and in retailing. The reduced number of Irish-born in Wrexham's lodgings - especially the small number of females - may be an indication of the increasing settlement of the Irish in town. An ageing population and gradual upward mobility were perhaps causing the Irish to settle down. The ten lodging-houses kept by Irish-born heads of households had 18 Irish-born lodgers out of their total of 50. There were three houses with no Irish-born and the highest concentration of Irish-born lodgers was in Number 22, Mount Street, where John Dempsey accommodated five out of his total clientele of eleven. It was Mount Street which had most lodging-houses, but, Irish street though it was, it had many non-Irish lodgers. At Number 9, Francis Fitzgerald described himself as a retired lodging - housekeeper, but he nevertheless had five lodgers, though none was Irish-born. Similarly, at Number 26, Patrick O'Neil recorded eleven lodgers but none Irish. Other lodging-houses in the town - Yorkshire Square, Pen-y-bryn, Mount Pleasant - had small numbers of Irish-born and it would seem that gone were the days, in Wrexham at least, when lodgings and lodging -houses were dominated by large numbers of Irish.

The Irish workforce in Wrexham in 1881 numbered 196, of whom 74 (38%) were in lodgings. There was thus a slight increase of 13 Irish lodgers over their numbers in 1871. Non-Irish lodgers numbered 105. There were eight Irish-kept lodging-houses with a total of 55 boarders, Mount Street and Salop Road being the locations of six; their numbers of lodgers ranged from five to ten. It was the private addresses which held the greatest numbers, no doubt because of the coincidence of the fair: for instance, Number 23, Brook Street, the house of Thomas Booth, umbrella maker, had twenty lodgers, including six from Italy - a bird seller and five musicians. The majority of lodgers were in this Brook Street/ Pentrefelin area (54), and in Salop Road (33), but again Mount Street had the greatest number (63). By 1881, of course, new building and building-on had taken place and small courts and squares had appeared off and behind the town's main streets, for example, Brown's Court and Mary Ann Square. These had developed into heavily - populated enclaves complete with their quota of lodgers. Number 5, Mount Street, with Turner's Court, housed 48 in all, including ten Irish-born and a rat-catcher's Irish-born wife. Number 7, Jones Square had 49 inhabitants and Alcock's Court, 43.

#### SALIENT FEATURES OF WREXHAM'S LODGING POPULATION IN 1851

Lodgers at 35 addresses: 170 (103 males, 67 females)

Average number of lodgers per address: 4.9

Lodgers in Lodging Houses/Inns: 55

Average number in lodging/Inns: 5.5

Highest numbers in single houses: 25 (1, Mount St), 17 (2, Mount St), 13 (106, Tuttle St)

Streets with highest numbers of lodgers: Mount St (67), Yorkshire Sq (34), Brook St (32)

Mount Street had 67 lodgers, or 18% of its total population.

## IRISH LODGERS AND LODGING-HOUSES IN HOLYWELL

While Holywell had its fair share of Irish lodgers, Irish-kept lodging-houses did not feature largely in the town's census returns. Indeed, in 1851, only two addresses were so described and, in 1881, only one; the 1861 and 1871 returns contained none.

Mary Kelly, of 62, Castle Hill, a thirty-year old and Co. Mayo-born, was given as a lodging-house keeper. She lived with her four-year old, Holywell-born son and sixty-year old Co. Cork-born brother-in-law. The rest of the household consisted of five Irish-born women- ranging in age from 30 to 81 years - and three Irish-born men aged 19 to 30. Seven of the nine Irish-born occupants of the house were born in Co. Mayo, one in Dublin and one in Cork. Apart from Mary Kelly herself and her small son, all were dealers and hawkers - of slippers, herring, small-wares and rags. Next door, in Number 63, Thomas and Bridget Durkin from Co. Mayo, although not designated as lodging-house keepers, had nine lodgers. In all, fifteen lived in the house, of whom thirteen were born in Co. Mayo. The male lodgers ranged in age from 14 to 49, the females from ten to 40. Six of the lodgers belonged to one family, the O'Neals.

At the other end of the town, in Bagillt Street, Annie Neary, 67 years, a widow, together with her 70-year old widowed sister, Bridget Fleming, gave themselves as lodging-house keepers who accommodated eleven lodgers. Eight of them were Irish-born, one Cardiff-born, one Derby-born and one Cheshire-born, the males among them aged from twelve to 56 and the females from 14 to 21 years. But the most Irish and the house with the most lodgers in Holywell in 1851 was Number 55, Chester Street at Whitehouses: its twenty-one occupants were all Irish-born. This

house was headed by a sixty-year old Patrick Kenny, a widower and hawker, with whom lived with his 38-year old, widowed daughter and her twelve-year old daughter. Their lodgers were from four families: Patrick and Mary Ferguson, each twenty years old; William and Ann Gallacher and their five children; George and Mary O'Neil and their three children; and Honoria Gallacher, a widow with her three children. The average age of the male heads of family was 34 years and of their wives and the single female head, 32 years.<sup>207</sup>

Seventy-three percent of Irish-born males aged 20 to 44 years in Holywell in 1851 were in lodgings. This was considerably more than the national level. 'Almost one-third of Irish-born males aged 20 to 44 lived as lodgers.'<sup>208</sup> The number of houses of certain socio-economic groups with lodgers was also higher than it was nationwide: one quarter of the Irish households in Occupational Class III, Skilled, had lodgers, compared to one in nine nationally. Two-thirds of Holywell's semi-skilled Irish households had lodgers whereas the national proportion was one in five, while for unskilled households the average number with lodgers was one in seven whereas in Holywell it four in five. Fifty-nine percent of the Irish households in the town had lodgers. At this time, 36% of households nationally consisted of a conjugal couple alone, that is, a married couple with at least one child and no one else.<sup>209</sup> In the Irish households of Holywell in 1851, this proportion was 38%. Nationally, 44% of households contained at least one extra person; in Holywell, 55% of Irish households had such an addition, most often in quantity.

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207 Source, Census Returns, 1851.

208 M. Anderson 'The Social Implications of Demographic Change', in F.M. Thompson (ed.), *Cambridge History of Britain, 1750 - 1950*, (C.U.P., 1990), Vol. 2, p.64.

209 *ibid*, p.65.

No Irish lodging-houses were listed in the 1861 census returns and very few lodgers. However, as has been previously pointed out, this year's returns were incomplete and poorly executed. It is unwise therefore to give them much weight. Similarly, none was listed in 1871, but six Irish households had lodgers. The numbers of lodgers had reduced from 1861, six being the most in one household: James Kelly and his wife, Mary, of Penyball Street had lodgers born in Middlesex, Pembroke, Llanelli, Shropshire, Cork and Flintshire. Their own 15-year old was born in Holywell so that their house was not particularly Irish-orientated. A few doors away, at Number 9, the widow Beeman, Malin-born and 77 years old, also had six lodgers, only one of whom was Irish-born. Nearby, Michael and Bridget Sharkey, both in their seventies, accommodated a hawker from Dundough, a musician from Italy, another hawker from Denbigh and a tailor from Liverpool. The other three households had two lodgers each, all Irish-born. The decline in the numbers of Irish lodgers continued into 1881. Ellen McCormick, of New Road, who in 1871 had two lodgers, was, by 1881, a widow and listed as a lodging-house keeper. However, she had no lodgers, but lived with her daughter and two grandchildren. Of the other addresses in Holywell, only one in Allen Square had lodgers. This was the household of 82-year old, Mayo-born, Bridget Tuffy, with her five 'guests'.

Two points have emerged about the Irish lodgers and their lodgings in Holywell: the comparative wealth of detail in the 1851 census and their decline over the period. In 1851, the Holywell Irish lodgers were at their most numerous and could be equated with the national picture; by 1871, they were far fewer. The decline is quantifiable, but was it gradual over the years? The unreliability of the 1861 census renders the question unanswerable, at least in decennial terms. A steady

decline from 1851 to 1871 would have given 1861 approximately 35 lodgers in the town. In 1851, Holywell had 49 lodgers in Irish households; by 1871, the number was down to 22 and, by 1881, to five. The uncommitted and the unskilled could be more mobile than those with a craft at their fingertips - they did not require premises, for example - and so we find that, in Holywell as in Mold, of all those single, male, Irish-born lodgers aged between 19 and 40 years of age in 1851, only one married and stayed on throughout the period. He was James Dunn, a hairdresser, who married a Holywell-born woman, with whom he had one daughter and two sons, one of whom was listed by 1881 as a 'printer-compositor'.

#### LODGERS AND LODGING-HOUSES IN FLINT

No Irish-headed lodging-houses appeared in the 1851 census returns and few lodgers. John Rush, 28 years, and his wife, Jane, of 51, Parish Lane, had one lodger, 17-year old Flint-born, Jane Foulkes. Also in Parish Lane, Edward and Margaret May, both Irish-born, had two Irish-born travellers, the sisters Mary and Catherine Fenny. In Church Street, Jane Dodd, a 37-year old Irish-born widow and her three sons, had taken in a labourer and his wife. A small total of five, but one which exceeded, by one, the number in the 1861 census. Flint lacked a quantity of work at this time and may even have had little accommodation for transients.

This changed by 1871: Flint had 95 lodgers in 33 Irish houses, or 2.9 per house. The Irish-born widow, Ellen O'Kell, 40 years, at Number 143, Mumforth Street, had James and Mary Murray and their five children as lodgers. Hers was the house with the largest number of lodgers, seven, while others ranged sequentially down to one each. Castle Street had the largest concentration of lodgings with 26 in ten houses, but Commercial Road had the highest density of lodgers: thirteen in four

houses (3.25 average). Redferns Row had eleven in five houses (2.2 average). Mumforth, Church, Feathers and Princess Streets each had two houses with lodgers and six other streets had one each with lodgers. By 1881, there were two lodging-houses listed: one, Number 133, Feathers Street, had ten lodgers, nine Irish-born and one from Liverpool. All but one were labourers, the exception being a mason. At Number 11 Church Street, the Hoghans and their three Flint-born children had 14 lodgers, all of them Irish-born. At twenty-five other addresses were 68 lodgers (2.7 average). Commercial Road had seventeen in four houses (4.24 average), with one household having nine 'guests'. Castle Street/View had 20 lodgers in five houses (4 average), Roskell Square had nine at three addresses and Queen Street six in three.

The need for income may have accounted for the fact that the Irish household was, on average, larger than others: lodgers improved family finances. However, this was not always so, for the extended family would have had an effect on household size. In Lancashire in 1851, twenty-three percent of non-Irish families had extended family members with them; only 18.7% of Irish families were so placed.<sup>210</sup> The Famine years had provoked massive migration, a process best done travelling light. Family members produced less, or no, help with the rent. 'But generally, even though Irish families were more likely to share housing, they were less likely to do so with kin'.<sup>211</sup> This, in Lancashire at least, changed as the century progressed, as the Irish 'prospered' and perhaps had less economic need of family networks. This phenomenon, on a smaller scale, was paralleled in Wrexham. In 1851, there were few extended families among Irish households; by 1861, there

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210 W.J.Lowe (1989), *op. cit.*, p.57.

211 *ibid.*, p.57.



were more; by 1871, fewer again: initial migration, followed by chain migration, followed by greater independence of family links. However, though the lodgers themselves were mainly transient, the provision of lodgings was a permanent feature of Irish life in Wrexham and the other North-East Wales towns.

## SUMMARY

Each of the four towns over the period showed a different pattern in the size of its Irish-born population. With the migration flow in and out of the town, Wrexham's Irish-born climbed steadily in numbers until 1871, then declined. The Irish-born in Mold were at their highest point in 1851 and their lowest in 1861, after which their numbers declined more erratically: highest in 1851, with a trough at the following Census, rising to 63% of its original number in 1871 and falling to its lowest point in 1881. Flint's Irish-born in 1851 numbered sixteen, or 0.5% of the total population of 3,296; by 1861, they represented 1.7%. Thereafter, they were approximately 6% of the townspeople.

From census evidence, it was seen that the Irish had originated mainly in Connacht and Leinster, but many had arrived in the four towns indirectly after wanderings in Britain, some indication of which may be gleaned from the birthplaces of their children. Chain migration was in evidence, particularly in Wrexham and Flint. The Irish became less 'restless' as the century progressed, settling down because of such factors and work commitments. Occupational Class IV was the most mobile, travelling light with marketable skills of low order. Lodgers - Irish and others in Irish households - were of importance in providing additional income, in a way that chain migration within families did not. Such transients confirmed the general impression that the Irish had a 'rambling disposition' and tended to live in overcrowded accommodation, even though there was evidence to the contrary.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IRISH COMMUNITY IN NORTH - EAST WALES

Whereas the previous chapter concentrated upon the mobility of the Irish, the need now is to consider the place they occupied in the community of North - East Wales. The ideas of mobility and community can be seen as mutually exclusive, but, over time, they may be reconciled. As Akenson has said, Irish Settlement was 'a multigenerational phenomenon', producing changing experiences and degrees of integration at different times and in different places.<sup>212</sup> The concept of community itself is an exclusive one. A static society in which there is little or no movement can only ever be short-lived for change is inevitable through ageing, sex imbalances, illness, etc. The larger the community, the smaller the need for mobility, for variations would be sufficient within it. So long as the economy did not change suddenly and drastically (as happened after the opening of the chemical works in Flint), random fluctuations from the norm could be ironed out. On the other hand, a completely fluid society - in which frequent population change was the norm - would lack hierarchical leadership and social organisation. In relation to the nineteenth-century Irish these models are over simplified. They did not live in static ghettos, nor did they travel value-free; they carried their mores with them. Their chain immigration ensured that they moved from one network of relationships to another, not dissimilar, at their destination. Michael Anderson has noted that 'such networks in the nineteenth-century cities seem to have performed considerable social functions for their members and to have exercised sufficient control over their activities, as well as influencing residential and locational patterns in the community at large.'<sup>213</sup> 'Mobility' and 'community' need not therefore be mutually exclusive, although the initiative in the evolution of a community will shift between the hosts and the

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212 D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora*, (Belfast, 1996), p.9.

213 M. Anderson, *The Structure of Nineteenth-Century Cities*, (1983).

newcomers. When the host society is eager or willing to accept the newly arrived, terms like 'assimilation' and 'accommodation' are appropriate, the hosts being prime movers in the process. At other times, when the immigrants seek acceptance by the hosts, 'integration' seems apt. 'Inherence' is neutral, implying a state arrived at: existing in and inseparable from something else. Were the Irish in such a symbiosis in North-East Wales?

Any attempt to gauge degrees of communal harmony or discord in a province at this time should, as always, have regard to the Irish experience elsewhere. Inevitably, much of the historiography derives from the study of larger urban areas. Here, the Catholic Church was instrumental in defining and maintaining Irishness, complementing family loyalties and reinforcing the ties of common nationality, so that Catholicism and Irishness became identified with each other. Another synonymity was Irishness and poverty. Steven Fielding found that, in Manchester, ethnic fade of the generations did not always occur where the Irish sought to hold on to their own identity through participation in the family, the school, church ceremonials, social clubs and welfare networks.<sup>214</sup> In Victorian Liverpool, Belchem notes, there was a significant Irish middle class, which helped in the development of an Irish Catholic awareness and an acceptance by host society.<sup>215</sup> By contrast, Hickman argues that the Catholic Church 'de-nationalised' the Irish, modifying their self-image and 'incorporating' them into British society.<sup>216</sup> Gallagher in his work on the Irish in Scotland makes the important point that the host society itself was

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214 S. Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity* (1993), p.17.

215 J. Belchem, 'Class, Creed and Country', in Swift and Gilley, (eds.), *The Irish in Victorian Britain* (1999), pp.190-211.

216 M. Hickman, 'Alternative Historiographies of the Irish in Britain' in Swift and Gilley (eds), (1999), pp.236-253.

changing over the period so that Irishness in relation to its setting could mean different things at different times.<sup>217</sup> If only in these three areas - institutions, class, social flux - studies of the Irish in the great Victorian cities provide directions for study of the smaller towns and their districts, even though the source materials may be of a different nature. Here, the work of such scholars as MacRaild on the Cumbrian towns of Workington, Maryport, Whitehaven and Cleator,<sup>218</sup> Herson on Stafford<sup>219</sup> and Danaher on Leicester<sup>220</sup> has provided a provincial perspective and indicated themes and approaches in local investigation such as inter-personal grievance (the 'Irish Row'), the Catholic Church, education, social clubs and societies where the separate identity and degree of accommodation of the Irish may be evaluated. These spheres of activity were, however, precisely the areas where the Irish were seen as most apart - separate in religion, in schooling and social behaviour - and to concentrate upon those areas may imply that integration did not take place. Nevertheless, areas such as membership of the Catholic Church, denominational schooling, and public disorder remain important sources for the study of the Irish in Britain.

The increases in the Irish communities in North-East Wales were reflected in the growth of the Catholic church in its ministration not only to the first generation Irish-born, but also subsequent generations of the locally-born of Irish families and, in addition, to those who, marrying into such families, espoused the Catholic faith

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217 T. Gallagher, 'The Catholic Irish in Scotland: In Search of Identity', in T.M. Devine (ed.), *Immigration and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (Edinburgh, 1991) pp.19-43.

218 D. MacRaild, *Culture, Conflict and Migration*, (Liverpool, 1998).

219 J. Herson, in Swift and Gilley (eds.) (1989 and 1999).

220 N.J.E. Danaher, *The Irish in Leicester, c. 1841 to 1891, A Study of a Minority Community in the East Midlands*, Ph.D. thesis, (Univ. of North London, 1999).

and its practices. Intermarriage was therefore a measure both of the strength of Catholicism in North-East Wales and of integration with the local communities. The attitudes of the local press also hinted at the degree of accommodation accorded the Irish on such issues as denominational schooling. The Welsh language may also have presented newcomers with a special difficulty, both in employment and in social life. However, it was crime and disorder that were the most sensitive issues at the interface between the Irish and the indigenous population. Religion, intermarriage, education, crime - these are to be the main concerns of this chapter in its attempt to identify which path the Irish travelled, that towards integration or that which led in the opposite direction.

Paul O'Leary has noted that 'For most historians of Irish emigrant communities, religion bulks large' That is, Catholicism, whose sudden post-Famine growth in Wales can only have reinforced perception of Irish difference within the largely Nonconformist population whose own growth in the first half of the century had far outstripped that of the Established Church.<sup>221</sup> This growth initially brought with it problems of adjustment both for the new arrivals and for the Catholic Church itself. For many, especially those pre-Famine migrants from the west of Ireland, Catholicism meant a personal credo tinged with a belief in magic and regulated more by seasonal rhythms than by church membership and ceremony. This changed after the Famine in the 'devotional revolution' which increased and institutionalised the church-going of Irish Catholics, both in Ireland and the rest of Britain.<sup>222</sup> This

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221 W.T.R. Pryce, Ph.D. thesis (1971), op. cit., Figure 78: 1801-51, 20 buildings erected with 4,000 additional 'sittings' in the Church of England; 290 buildings with 63,000 'sittings' in the Nonconformist Churches.

222 See E. Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75', in *American Historical Review*, 77(1972) and D.W. Millar, 'Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine', in *Journal of Social History*, ix, (1975).

'revolution' required that churches and chapels be made available for worship and accessible to worshippers. From mid- century therefore, Irish Catholics could be located and their separateness was confirmed.

This provision was initiated and guided in South Wales by Bishop T.J. Brown, Vicar Apostolic of Wales from 1840 to 1850. Forty-three new chapels were opened in the thirty years to 1870, an achievement highlighted by the fact that only 24 were built in the succeeding thirty years to 1900.<sup>223</sup> In North Wales, with its smaller numbers of Catholics, the comparative figures were twelve and four, with two pre-dating 1840, Bangor (1827) and Holywell (1833)<sup>224</sup> The gradual development of the Catholic church in nineteenth-century Wales was typified by the progress in Wrexham from meetings in rented rooms, and mass in private houses, to a house in King Street built in 1828 by local iron founder, Richard Thompson, who avoided the puritan objections of the vendor of the land by arranging the priest's quarters on the ground floor and the chapel upstairs. This building was marked on John Wood's map of Wrexham as 'Catholick Chapel' so that by then the subterfuge must have been accepted. In 1857, Thompson, at a cost of £9000, built Saint Mary's Church, the present cathedral.<sup>225</sup> (This is a story closely paralleled by that of Catholicism in Barrow, where mass was conducted above the paint shop, to be transferred in 1867 to a church by E.W. Pugin, also the architect of Wrexham's Catholic church). In Holywell - a focus for Jesuits and pilgrims to Saint Winifred's Shrine - worship was regularly conducted in the 'Cross Keys' and 'Star' Inns. Gravestones in the cemetery of Saint James Anglican Church have Catholic inscriptions - 'Pray for the soul of .....' and parish registers contain many names of Irish: 19 January 1829 James

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223 P. O'Leary (2000), op., p.215.

224 Cardiff Provincial Directory and Year Book 1996, pp.161-180.

225 A.N. Palmer, *The History of the Town of Wrexham* (Wrexham), 1893, pp.75-80.



Reegan, aged 45; 18 July 1834 Charles Muldone, aged 15; 28 June 1835 Augustus Flynn, aged 3 days.<sup>226</sup> The Jesuit mission in Holywell - in the town since 1580 - also served the Catholics of Flint from 1852 until secular clergy were appointed in 1884, with assistant priests from 1900. The present church was opened in 1885.<sup>227</sup>

The Religious Census of 1851 did not identify the national origins of worshippers, so it is impossible to know how many Irish were included in its figures. At first glance, Catholics appear to have been statistically overwhelmed by other denominations, particularly in North Wales. In Holywell, for instance, 8,777 (61%) Nonconformists and 4,931 (34%) Anglicans attended morning service on 31 March 1851 compared to 354 (2.4%) Catholics. However, the total Nonconformist attendance was spread between Independents, Baptists, Methodists, Wesleyans and others. In Wrexham, morning attendance showed a similar imbalance between the churches with 4,760 (44%) Church of England and 5,654 (52%) Nonconformists to the Catholics 240 (2.2%). Addition of the total attendances for morning, afternoon and evening shows an even greater imbalance with 8,836 (23%) Anglicans and 27,371 (72%) Nonconformists in Holywell to 654 (1.6%) Catholics; in Wrexham, the Anglicans numbered 8,376 (27%), the Nonconformists 18,496 (59%) and the Catholics 360 (1.1%). In Mold also, there was a similar preponderance on Nonconformists. Here the Catholics - who met in Milford House, not in a chapel of their own - had a morning attendance of 133 and an afternoon meeting for 41 scholars.

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<sup>226</sup> Wynne-Woodhouse, *Hel Achau*, No. 33, April 1991, p.12.

<sup>227</sup> J. Rudd, *Catholic Flint Past and Present*, (I.H.S.), 1957, pp.24-26.

This contrasted with the total Nonconformist attendance for the day of 2,029. There were no returns for the Catholics in Flint. Furthermore, in Wrexham, the Church of England offered 40% of the town's total 'sittings', free and unappropriated, the Nonconformists 59%, while the Catholics had a mere one percent. Without doubt, Wrexham in 1851 was a Nonconformist town, as indeed were other North Wales towns, such as Caernarfon, Rhuthun, Dolgellau and Ffestiniog, where no Catholics were recorded on Census Sunday. However, such comparisons do not take into account the fact that Protestants were expected to attend church more than once on Sunday while for Catholics morning attendance was deemed enough to maintain membership of the church. If, therefore, like were to be compared with like and only Sunday morning services considered, in Wrexham the Catholic attendance rate was 79%, Anglican 39%, Calvinistic Methodists 40% and all Nonconformists 29%. In Holywell, the Catholics were even more assiduous in their attendance with 100%, while the Anglicans lagged with 46%, the Methodists 50% and Nonconformists as a whole, 43%.<sup>228</sup> In this aspect of religion adherence, the Catholics, though comparatively few in number, were distinguishable from their Protestant hosts; they were also largely Irish, distinguishable from their British hosts.

In assuming that most Catholics were Irish, an analysis of the 1851 Census of Religion can provide no more than a crude indication of Irish separateness within the larger community. More pertinent evidence of Irish immigration may be gleaned from Catholic Church marriage records of the period. These show that in Saint David's, Mold, from 1864 to 1881, marriages in which both partners were Irish accounted for 42% of all marriages, while those in which only one partner was Irish

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<sup>228</sup> Source: Religious Census, 1851.

accounted for 58%. Of the latter figure, 55% were between an Irish woman and a non-Irish husband. In Saint Winifred's Holywell, between 1860 and 1881, a more equal situation obtained, with 51% of marriages between two Irish partners and 49% between Irish and non-Irish.<sup>229</sup>

The marriage records of Wrexham's Cathedral Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, with their greater numbers, show a more dynamic picture of integration, particularly so if scrutiny is conducted to 1900. From 1856 to 1881, there were 85 marriages between Irish partners and 80 between Irish and non-Irish; between 1881 and 1899, therefore, there were 126 marriages between Irish people and 150 between Irish and others, largely from the locality. Breaking the half-century into smaller periods discloses a process of integration between the Irish and their hosts. From 1856 to 1869, there were 54 Intra – Irish marriages and 47 'mixed' marriages; from 1870 to 1881, there was a greater balance with 32 Intra – Irish and 33 'mixed' marriages; then from 1882 to 1899, the process moved apace with 40 Intra – Irish and 70 'mixed' unions.<sup>230</sup> That is, the Irish migrants of the second and third generations were merging with their community – a fact recognised by officiating priests who, from 1893, wrote such marginalia as 'MATRIMO MIXTUM' and 'MIXTO RELIGIONIS'.<sup>231</sup>

In Flint, the marriage registers of the church of the Immaculate Conception show a similar process of integration between the Irish and their local community. The main difference was in the timing. Whereas in Wrexham an increase in mixed marriages was strongly evident in the 1880s and 90s, in Flint it was not until the

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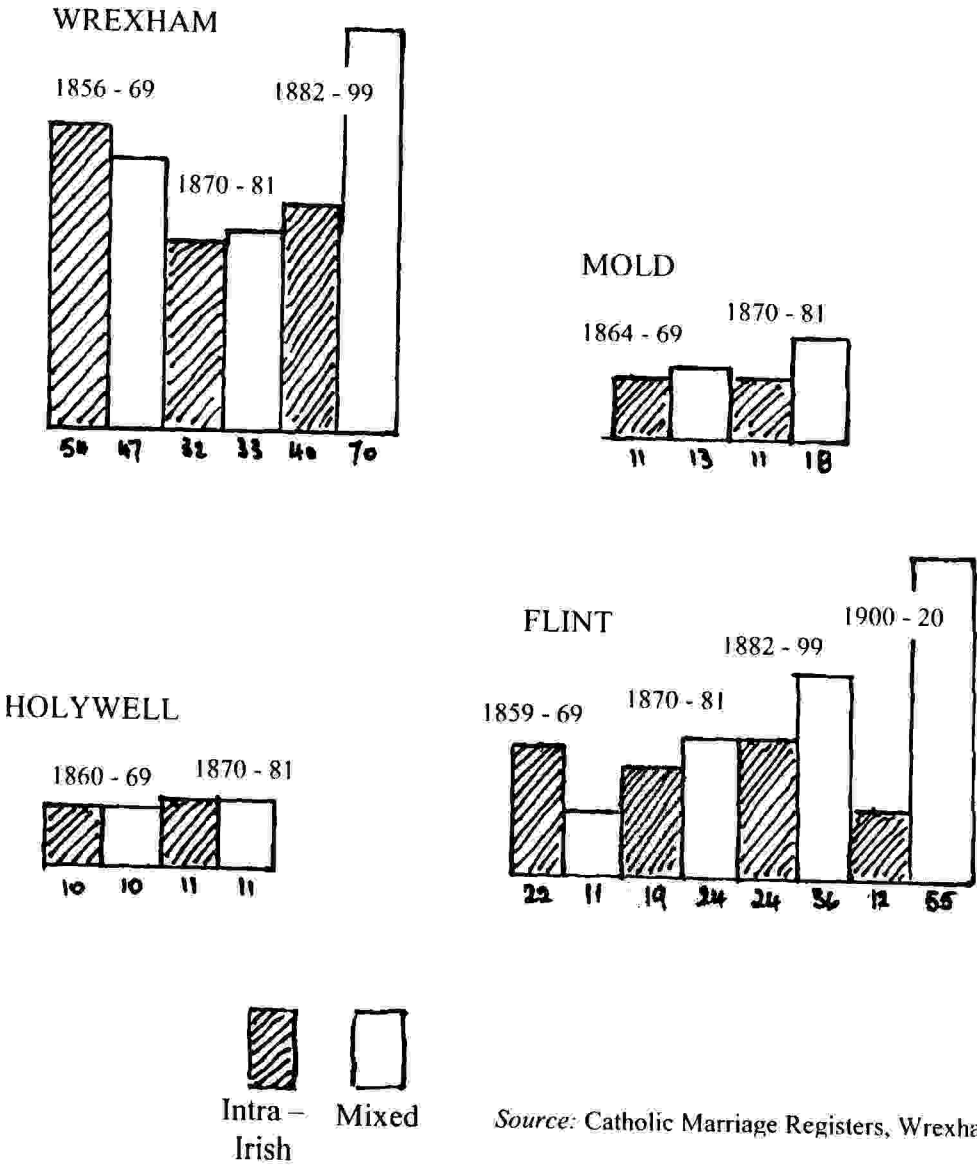
229 Marriage Registers, LIBER MATRIMONIORUM, Bishop's House, Wrexham.

230 LIBER MATRIMONIORUM, from 13 January 1856, St Mary's Cathedral Archives, Wrexham.

231 For instance, Kelly and Pickering, 16 April 1893, and Beirne and Jones, 23 January 1895.

early years of the following century that they were in the clear minority. This was to be expected for the bulk of the Irish did not arrive in Flint until the 1860s and 70s, in early days probably already married, Irish to Irish. From 1859 to 1899, the percentage of mixed marriage increased in Wrexham by 17% from 47% to 64%, but in Flint by 27% from 33% to 60%. By 1920, however, 82% of marriages among the Irish in Flint were mixed. (See TABLE 36 and FIGURE 21).

Figure 21: Intra - Irish and 'mixed' marriages, 1856 - 1920, in Catholic churches, Wrexham, Mold, Holywell and Flint.



*Table 36: Numbers of Intra - Irish and 'mixed' marriages Wrexham, Flint, Mold and Holywell, 1856 - 1920 (Catholic Churches).*

DATES	WREXHAM (1856 - 99)		FLINT (1859 - 1920)		MOLD (1864 - 81)		HOLYWELL (1860 - 81)	
	Irish	Mixed	Irish	Mixed	Irish	Mixed	Irish	Mixed
1856 - 69	54	47	22	11	11	13	10	10
1870 - 81	32	33	19	24	11	18	11	11
1882 - 99	40	70	24	36				
1900 - 1920			12	55				

*Sources:* Catholic Marriage Registers.

Who took the initiative in integration through marriage, Irish men or Irish women? In Wrexham, of all mixed marriages between 1856 and 1899, 47% were between Irish husbands and non-Irish wives, and therefore 53% between Irish wives and non-Irish husbands. Until 1877, the majority of mixed marriages were between Irish wives and non-Irish husbands (40:29), but between 1878 and 1888 more Irish men than Irish women married local spouses (17:11). Thereafter, to 1899, honours were about even (24 men: 28 women). In Flint, with the growth in Irish numbers coming later in the century, the opposite situation was found, with 53% of mixed marriages between Irish men and non-Irish women and in 47% the relationship being reversed. It was not until after 1889 that Irish brides in Flint were more numerous than Irish grooms and, by 1920, the situation mirrored that in Wrexham, 1856 – 1899; this is, 47% of mixed marriages with Irish men and 53% with Irish women. Priests' annotations of 'MIXTA RELIGIONIS' were not made in Flint until 1924, thirty-one years or a generation after their appearance in Wrexham's registers. The rites accompanying marriage, birth and death were crucial for the Catholic Church – indeed, any Church – in the maintenance and strengthening of the allegiance of its

flock.<sup>232</sup> The Church strove to maintain orthodoxy in its rites and conditions and insisted on non-Catholic sponsors allowing their partners free religion worship and on the rearing of children in the Catholic faith. Mixed marriages, which grew in number for demographic reasons as the century entered its last quarter, no doubt enlarged the Church's horizons and diluted any sense of isolation; nevertheless, they existed under the patronage of the Church, a condition which marked them off from the Anglican – Nonconformist norm.<sup>233</sup>

It would seem that, by 1920, marital integration of the Irish into North-East Wales society had reached a point where the editor of a Catholic magazine was justified in saying '...intermarriage shows that whereas a generation ago our people did not as a whole mix with people of this community, today the blending of the Irish and the Welsh is going ahead at a great pace'.<sup>234</sup> In 1836, James Butterworth, pawnbroker of Manchester, had declared to a Royal Commission that the Irish and their hosts were 'like oil and water'.<sup>235</sup> Almost a hundred years later, the 'mixing' of migrants and local people was still not universal; it was a process over time. This returns us to Donald Akenson's conception of Irish migration as a 'multigenerational phenomenon', which includes the migrant group, their offspring and 'subsequent generations of descendants'.<sup>236</sup>

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232 The idea of the Irish as a 'nation within a nation' (Hugh Heinrich, 1870) is contrasted by Fielding with another of the Irish as '.....alienated, demoralised, dispersed, transient, politically disorganised and barely interested in Catholicism' (Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, op. cit. (1983), pp.12-13.

233 Hickman sees the Catholic Church as an instrument for controlling Irish self-image and for incorporating the Irish into British life: a strategy designed '....to weaken Irish national identity'. (M. Hickman in Swift and Gilley [1999], p.249.) For Sheridan Gilley, Irish Catholic communities in Britain had a double loyalty, to Faith and Fatherland. 'Catholics thought of themselves as Roman Catholics first, not as members of a wider working class', bound together (at least in Glasgow) by the Orange-Green opposition and a Protestant revival. (S. Gilley, in Swift and Gilley, (eds.) (1989), pp. 214-216.)

234 *St Peter's Magazine*, III, (1923), pp. 52-53, quoted in O'Leary (2000), pp.238-239.

235 See Chapter One, p. 38.

236 D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora*, (1996), op. cit., p.9

Catholic schooling no doubt had a similar dual effect of consolidating and isolating. Hard, objective evidence is difficult to unearth for such sources as personal correspondence and diaries are scarce, and the local press was distinctly anti-Catholic. In its columns, conversion to Catholicism was dubbed a 'perversion' which caused great grief.<sup>237</sup> The priest of St Mary's Wrexham, was described as 'Mrs Gamp in a nightgown' in a 'Romish performance'. The *Wrexham Advertiser* made its position on the matter of schooling quite clear in its editorial of 25 October 1873:

Denominational education at their own expense they are welcome to, but we fear that they want to do their charity out of the public purse..... it is cheering to turn from these Irish Popish preposterous demands to the statesmanlike Welsh Protestant utterances on the same subject ....<sup>238</sup>

In 1840, Bishop T.J. Brown was appointed Catholic Vicar Apostolic to the recently-created Welsh district. He believed that the continuance of Catholicism among his Irish flock was dependent upon a moral code and a body of teaching, best inculcated through parental example and Catholic schools.<sup>239</sup> One of his pedagogic priests, Farther Carroll of Merthyr Tydfil and Tredegar, advocated technical education as a means of improving the condition and character of workers and, along with others, believed that denominational schooling would counteract the destructive effect of an education devoid of any religious context.<sup>240</sup> After the Education Act of 1870, denominational schooling became a contentious issue in Wales. A reinvigorated Catholic Church saw its elementary schools as a potent means of maintaining working-class loyalty. By 1895, a Catholic magazine was to claim that

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<sup>237</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 31 October 1868.

<sup>238</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 21 October 1871.

<sup>239</sup> O'Leary (2002), p.62.

<sup>240</sup> *ibid.*, pp.62-63.

interference by the new local School Boards in Catholic Schools could lead to the 'protestantising' and 'denationalising' of the Irish, a contention which had its echoes a hundred years later in the work of Hickman.<sup>241</sup>

Catholic schooling in Wrexham had begun in Wrexham in 1840 with approximately fifty pupils in the house in King Street. By 1843, it was one of four Catholic Poor schools in Wales, the others being in Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff and Newport. Thereafter, it followed a nomadic existence, moving to Bank Street, Yorke Street, Bank Street again, King Street again, Hill Street, Mount Street, Brook Street and Tinkers Lane. In 1850, the Catholic Poor School Committee of England and Wales awarded £15 to Wrexham to support the school. (Dowlais and Chepstow received £20 each and Bangor £15)<sup>242</sup> By 1871, Saint Mary's School had 190 on roll, with an average attendance of 120 and an annual income from 'school pence' of £36.. 13s .. 6d, or approximately 3d per day per pupil over the 216 days the school was open. H.M.I. reported that 'the discipline and instruction of this school are highly satisfactory'.<sup>243</sup> The mobility of the Irish population of the town perhaps had its analogues in the many locations of the Catholic schools and the irregular attendance of their pupils. For the week ending 15 March 1873, for instance, Wrexham's National School had 78% attendance, the Boys' Ragged 64%, but Saint Mary's barely 52%.<sup>244</sup> In 1879, the Bishop of Shrewsbury, whose diocese at the time included North Wales, Shropshire and Cheshire, asked the Rock Ferry-based Sisters of the Immaculate Conception to teach at the school. It remained an all-age school

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241 Hickman, (1999), op. cit.

242 P. O'Leary (2000), p. 64.

243 H.M.I. Report, *Wrexham Advertiser*, 17 June 1871.

244 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 22 March 1873.



until 1960, when Saint Joseph's Secondary school was established.<sup>245</sup>

The use of Thompson's King Street house as a school illustrates the part played by patrons in establishing institutions, particularly before the 1870 Education Act. Without such patronage and church organisation, development would have been slow indeed. As one inspector commented,

.... the most formidable obstacle which confronts the promoters of Catholic education for the poor .... is that many of them profess to be, and often really are, too sorely burdened with poverty either to contribute anything towards the education of their children, or to forgo the scanty earnings by which their premature toil not infrequently alleviates their own destitution.<sup>246</sup>

The Mostyn family underwrote the Catholic school at Talacre in North-East Flintshire, a school which received an encouraging report in 1853 from H.M.I. Stokes. Sir Pyers Mostyn had promised to build a new school and, the inspector remarked, 'the teacher and the children deserve that this should be done for them,' a promise discharged by 1856-57 when the buildings were classed as 'superior'.<sup>247</sup> This compared favourably with the report on Ince Blundell Catholic Girls' School, Cheshire, where the instruction was 'very limited' and pupils 'comprehended little of the reading lessons'.<sup>248</sup> Mention was made of the limited command of the English language by the Talacre children.<sup>249</sup> Eight years after the 'Treachery of the Blue

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245 *ibid.*, 21 May 1993 (school centenary edition).

246 Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, 1853-54, p.1171.

247 *ibid.*, p.1224.

248 *ibid.*, p.1224. This lack of comprehension was again to be remarked upon some thirty years later in the Committee's 1880-81 Report on South Wales. The inspector reported that 'I am informed that a poet has four legs, and that a benefit is a bad thing to have.' He laid the blame on the prevalence of the Welsh language as 55% of the area's 24,383 children over seven years of age used Welsh habitually at home; lack of intelligent conversation at home and inappropriate books at school also contributed. (Report of the committee of Council on Education, 1880 - 81, p.314).

249 *ibid.* p.1224 'In spite of their ignorance of the English language when first entering school, the first class read remarkably well, and write from dictation with accuracy'.

Books', the issues of language and nationality were still in the minds of officials. In the 1855 - 56 Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, H.M.I. Morrell compared North and South Wales:

North Wales is in every respect more primitive and pastoral; the ancient language is spoken in greater purity, and more exclusively amongst the great bulk of the people; and society is less open to foreign influences, and more peculiarly national in its character.<sup>250</sup>

Catholic schools, with their 'foreign influences', could have been an instrument for opening the minds of the school children, although the *Wrexham Advertiser* would not have agreed: rather they were hotbeds of resistance and rebellion - Popish and Irish. On 15 December 1877, the paper reported an outbreak of diphtheria in Wrexham. A Mount Street public house kept by the O'Brien family was identified as the 'incubator' of the infection which had, in the main, attacked children attending the Catholic school in Brook Street. Dr Hubert Airy was appointed to investigate the outbreak. He found 'nothing unwholesome' about the school and indeed was at some pains to point out that other schools had been 'centres of infection'. He made no connection between disease, religion and nationality.<sup>251</sup> Judging from the paper's reporting of the outbreak, the *Advertiser* must have had a disappointed editor. Or, to be fair, was the paper merely reflecting wider concerns about public health improvement, the inter-dependency of the community and even faith in the efficacy of education? The town's Medical Officer of Health at a meeting of the Sanitary and Highways Committee held on 12 December 1877 had expressed the state of affairs:

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250 Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, 1855-56, p.553.

251 Dr Airy's Report to the Local Government Board on Diphtheria in parts of the Wrexham Registration District, 1878, p.2, paragraphs 8 - 9.

..... under the working of the new Education Act the poorer classes will learn to understand that the measures taken by any Sanitary Authority for the prevention of the spread of any zymotic disease, are taken for the common welfare of all.

With the new Act, the Catholic Irish would 'learn to understand', along with all the others in 'the poorer classes'. Had the paper merely sought to speed the process?

By 1872-73, there was one Catholic school in Denbighshire – in Wrexham - and four in Flintshire, including Talacre which, that year, received a Parliamentary grant of £670 for buildings and fixtures and an annual grant of £78.7s.10d. The average attendance at Talacre was 78.<sup>252</sup> The number of these schools remained the same in 1880-81, one in Denbighshire and four in Flintshire. Wrexham's Catholic school had an average attendance of 131, for which it received its annual grant of £14.10s.8d. Flint Catholic School, by then, had an average attendance of 62 (annual grant £29.17s.11d); Saint Winifred's, Holywell, had an average attendance of 110 (£47.8s.7d); Saint David's, Mold averaged 56 out of a possible 115 and received £26.18s.8d. Talacre at this time had an average attendance of 115 in a school offering 310 places and received a grant of £670 for capital improvements and an annual grant of £94.11s.0d.<sup>253</sup> For 1880-81, a polarity between Catholic and National schools is revealed when the average attendance figures and the schools' potential numbers are compared. ('Number of Schools for whom accommodation is provided') In Wrexham, the Catholic School's average attendance was 79% of its potential, whereas the average at the national schools (boys and girls) was 53.5%. Similarly, in Holywell, the Catholic average attendance was 75% of its potential,

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252 Report of the Committee of Council on Education, 1872-73, p.529.

253 Report of the Committee of Council on Education, 1880-81, p.738.

whereas the National schools was 39%. In Flint and Mold, the polarity was reversed: 33% and 49% respectively at the Catholic Schools, 74% and 84% at the National Schools. At a glance, the Catholic average attendance was 37% of its potential but, as there were no other schools in the village, no comparison is possible.

*Table 37: Average attendance and potential attendance, Catholic and national schools, 1880-1881.*

	WREXHAM		HOLYWELL		FLINT		MOLD		TALACRE
	CATH.	NAT.	CATH.	NAT.	CATH.	NAT.	CATH.	NAT.	CATH.
Potential	165	603	148	306	187	439	115	362	310
Av. Attend	131	321	111	118	62	323	56	304	115
%	79%	53.5%	75%	39%	33%	74%	49%	84%	37%

*Source:* Report of the Committee of Council on Education, 1880 – 1881.

Why this polarity? Could it be that in Wrexham and Holywell, the relationship between church, school and family was stronger and that the control of children was firmer than in Flint and Mold? Or that, in Flint and Mold, where the Catholic schools were established later, a more generous provision in accommodation had been made, resulting in great discrepancy between possible and actual attendance? Or, again, that in Flint and Mold there were greater opportunities for casual and seasonal work for children and consequently greater absenteeism at school? The Irish population of Flint was after all, comparatively newly - arrived and, by 1880, not so well - established in social structure as those in the other towns; besides which - to cast back to the inspector's comment of 1853 - sending children to school meant they had 'to forgo the scanty earnings' which helped with exiguous family income. Whatever the reason for the apparently low average attendance rate, the Catholic schools at Flint and Talacre had more room per child than their fellow - establishments in other towns; that is, less crowded environments. Could this have been a mark of segregation?

Following the passing of the Education Act, voters organised themselves with electoral advantage in mind: according to denominational allegiances. For instance, in 1870 a priest in Swansea told his congregation to vote 'in the interests of his religion', adding instructions on how to do it.<sup>254</sup> Politics and religion were openly in partnership on the School Boards. However, the clergy were not the only rallying points for Irish Catholic aspirations; the Irish middle class increasingly played a part in local politics as exemplified by John Beirne, the Wrexham chandler and brewer who became the town's mayor in 1876, and the Muspratts of Flint, who served as mayors and council members. Both businessmen and the Church depended for their success on enlarging their spheres of activity, but whereas the former were more in need of a widening network of contacts, the latter drew its strength from congregation. Denominational schooling was one instrument for achieving this solidarity.

One would suspect that another means was association for mutual benefit or interest. Here again evidence is scanty. The Mont Alto Friendly Society of Mold was established in February 1841 for members' mutual relief in sickness and providing for their respective funerals'.<sup>255</sup> The Orange Benefit Club met in the Swan Inn, Rhosymedre, near Rhiwabon, on one occasion to hear an anti – trade union address by Mr Whalley.<sup>256</sup> Associations such as these provided networks of support against the uncertainties of life in a strange land, but also a means by which the respectable Irish could stand off from their improvident compatriots. The Mont Alto Society, for example, imposed a fine of two shillings and sixpence for proposing a candidate 'who is a habitual drunkard, of quarrelsome or immoral character, or one

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254 P. O'Leary, (2000), op. cit. p258.

255 Mold Library, 04-22-1997/09-30-02.

256 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 12 January 1867.

that is unhealthy.....' Obviously, friendly societies were most numerous where immigration was heaviest and their history is dominated by South Wales; indeed, in the County of Denbighshire list of Benefit Societies dated 27 October 1874, no Irish societies appear.<sup>257</sup> The Catholic Church therefore, would seem to have been the chief distinguishing institution of the Irish, together with their schools, but as time went on, there appeared signs that the Irish were becoming more secular in their interests. One such, albeit faint, was the existence in Flint in 1886 of an Irish Society. No such society seems to have existed elsewhere in North-East Wales. Wrexham's Irish by this time were well settled into the life of the town and those of Mold and Holywell were too few for formal association. In Flint, however, the Irish were different. Most of them had arrived comparatively late in the day with their Irishness confirmed by a corporate life elsewhere, especially in South Lancashire and Cheshire. By 1886, a local paper said that there was in Flint 'somewhat of an Irish colony in Wales'.<sup>258</sup> The Irish Society was keen to listen to Michael Davitt, the founder of the Irish National Land League and campaign for agrarian reform. Davitt was bound for Blaenau Ffestiniog to share a platform with the 23-year old David Lloyd George before an audience of 1,500 quarrymen. Flint may well have been chosen as a venue for his oratory because the Irish in the town could guarantee a sympathetic audience.<sup>259</sup> Notwithstanding, the existence of an Irish society in Flint indicated a degree of self-definition to be found among the town's Irish at this time.

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257 County Record Office, Ruthin, QSD/DN/9/3.

258 *Chester Chronicle*, 13 February 1886, editorial.

259 K.O. Morgan (ed.), *Lloyd George Family Letters, 1885 – 1936*, (U.W.P./O.U.P., 1973), p.12; K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868 – 1922*, (Cardiff, 1963, 1972), p.68; J. G. Jones, 'Michael Davitt, David Lloyd George and T. E. Ellis: the Welsh Experience, 1886', in *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 18, (1997) No. 3, p.460.

This year 1886, was to see the issues of land reform and tithe brought together. Dislike of landowners and resentment of the Anglican Church found expression in the Tithe War. The air was charged with dissent – land reforms, church establishment, tithe disputes, distraint auctions where bailiffs were assaulted and troops called out. The Irish as a body were not implicated in all this, but the general mood was there to sense; besides which they and their families had had experience of such matters back in Ireland. As time progressed, they clung to their church, developed their Catholic schools, and, as more and more of them were enfranchised, sought their political ends through constitutional methods. To have harboured Fenian sympathies in the 1860s may have indicated a willingness on the part of the Irish to remain apart from the community, but, by the 1880s, this had turned into something more akin to a desire for integration. Sectarian conflict between the Irish themselves was not seen in this part of Wales - the 'Orange card' was never played, as it was, say, in Liverpool and Glasgow. This may have been due to the dominance of the Liberal Party in Wales and the influence of Gladstone, - or the small numbers of Irish and the comparative dearth of Ulster Protestants - and anti-Catholic feeling was never exploited in North Wales politics. The disputes of the mid-century were sublimated into a more sympathetic cooperation on Home Rule issues. There are pointers here towards the need for a longer view to be taken in considering the issues of 'ethnic fade' and Irish integration. The journey from post-Famine hostility, through Fenianism and anti-Catholicism to eventual 'ethnic fade' took three generations, from the 1850s to the 1920s. As O'Leary says,

By focusing on the crisis years of the mid-century ..... there is a danger that the picture painted will be excessively sombre ..... Despite the creation of distinctive ethnic institutions, the Irish were not consigned to a ghetto and, over time, intermarriage between Catholics and non-Catholics provided evidence of closer contact at the domestic level.<sup>260</sup>

At the personal, everyday level, one obstacle to Irish migration could have been the Welsh language. In Wales, this was a problem for immigrants which was unique to Britain. Those Irish who were bilingual in English and Irish found themselves faced with a third language. How great an obstacle was this to economic survival and to community cohesion? In mid-century in the remoter parts of Wales - for instance, in the mining villages in the upper South Wales valleys - Welsh was the language of the workplace and social life. This became less so in the later nineteenth century, as Welsh progressively lost its dominance in the larger towns of the South-East, so that knowledge of the language was not generally needed for employment. The Irish could have coped, as did others. English migrants in the South Wales valleys, for example, found that the best jobs in the mines - that is, coal-cutting - went to the native Welsh while they had to make do with haulage and surface work. 'Social survival led many to learn Welsh'<sup>261</sup> The Census of 1891 - the first to give details of linguistic knowledge - showed that 54% of the population knew Welsh and 69% knew English and it is not unreasonable to speculate that, by 1870 - 80, a grasp of English, although often weak, was more commonly found than a grasp of Welsh.<sup>262</sup> In Denbighshire, 33% of the population over three years knew Welsh only; in

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260 P. O'Leary, (2000), op. cit., p.312.

261 Neil Evans, 'Immigrants and Minorities in Wales, 1840 - 1990', in *Llafur*, 5/4, 1991, p.6.

262 J. Davies *Hanes Cymru*, 1990, p.421.



Flintshire 26%<sup>263</sup> It is sometimes said that the 1870 Education Act was the chief cause of the fall in the numbers. However, the practice of 'payment by results' had been adopted some years before and the annual school tests were limited to arithmetic, reading and writing in English, with Welsh 'banished from the schools'<sup>264</sup> The repression of the 'Welsh Not', hung around pupils' necks for speaking Welsh, has been regarded by some historians as a measure reinforcing Welsh 'as an inferior and gutter tongue',<sup>265</sup> but by others as having been exaggerated by twentieth-century mythology.<sup>266</sup> In fact, the decline of Welsh was due to a variety of reasons - demographic, social, economic - and not to a single cause. The decline had also been occurring in North-East Wales. In 1846, Welsh was dominant in an area roughly bounded by the Vale of Clwyd and, in the west, the Conwy Valley; beyond was the mountainous heartland of the country. The Welsh area of the two counties of Denbighshire and Flintshire included the uplands to the west of the Vale of Clwyd, the Vale of Llangollen and Rhiwabon, together with the northern part of Flintshire centred on Caerwys and adjoining the Dee Estuary at Mostyn and Talacre. To the east of this Welsh-speaking area lay a belt of bilingualism which included Holywell, Flint and Mold, together with their hinterlands, plus the valley of the River Alyn and Wrexham.<sup>267</sup> (See FIGURE 22) A map would seem to show an invasion from the east, but in fact it was economics that attracted English-speaking migrants, not mere territory-Wrexham's industry and commerce, Saltney and Shotton's factories and foundries. The 1847 Commissioners' Report on Education in Wales provided

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263 J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, Vol 1.

264 J. Davies, op. cit., p.421.

265 G. A. Williams, *'When Was Wales?' 1985*, p.246.

266 J. Davies, 1990, op. cit., p.439.

267 W. T. R. Pryce, op. cit., Figure 22.

information on the relative strengths of English and Welsh some forty years before the first national census to quantify language usage. The commissioners ascertained (or at least estimated) the number speaking Welsh in a parish, subtracted that number from the 1841 population of the parish and pronounced it as 'habitually speaking English (or Welsh)'. Northop was thus classified as largely English-speaking, having a population of 3,566 in 1841, and 1,500 habitually speaking Welsh. Flintshire as a whole therefore was approximately half-English and half Welsh, with English slightly dominant. The county had seven parishes with an English bias, that is, six in detached Maelor, plus Hawarden. There were eleven parishes where most people were Welsh-speaking, all in the north-east, for instance, Llanasa, Gwaenysgor, Tremeirchion. The ten parishes which were predominantly English-speaking lay in the south of Flintshire and included three of the four towns under consideration in this study: most to the east of Offa's Dyke. The commissioners' estimates gave Flint as 80% English-speaking, Mold 50% and the village of Cilcen at the foot of Moel Famau, 8%. In the towns, many more were conversant with English than in the remoter parts like Cilcen, a finding endorsed by the language usage in Sunday schools: Flint's were overall conducted in English, Cilcen's overwhelmingly in Welsh. In the county as a whole, 51 Sunday schools were conducted in Welsh, 20 in English and 64 in both languages<sup>268</sup> (A similar basic pattern was repeated 75 years later, in 1921, with Welsh dominant in the west of Denbighshire and English dominant in Flintshire and the east). The 1891 Census showed that the overall number able to speak Welsh in the two counties was 99,588, or 62.5%.<sup>269</sup>

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268 J. Goronwy Edwards, 'Flintshire a Hundred Years Ago' in *Flintshire Historical Society Publications*, Vol. 17, 1957, pp.67 to 81.

269 C. James, 'The Language in Clwyd' in *Planet* 28, 1975, pp.25 to 35.

The Irish, therefore, would not have been denied employment solely on the grounds of language. There were few monoglot Welsh on the scene by the 1860s and 70s, beside which migrants would be expected, when necessary, to acquire sufficient Welsh to be able to function in the workplace. And they did.<sup>270</sup> The Catholic church, however, was not always keen to encourage Welsh in its schools, sometimes seeing it as a threat to the primacy of Catholic identity: Catholic first, Irish or Welsh afterwards. In this, the Catholic Church may unwittingly have been an agent of assimilation, homogenising disparate ethnic elements into British society;<sup>271</sup> if, indeed, this is what happened, for there is no hard evidence that all Catholic schools were opposed to the inclusion of Welsh in the curriculum. Rather, assimilation may have occurred by default, as it did in Leicester:

Denominational schooling in theory should have hindered, or even prevented, cultural assimilation; however, the variable attendance rate, the ever increasing impact of popular mass culture, the predictably unadventurous curriculum, rooted in middle-class prescription, and the political outlook of the Catholic hierarchy all ensured an assimilative conditioning.<sup>272</sup>

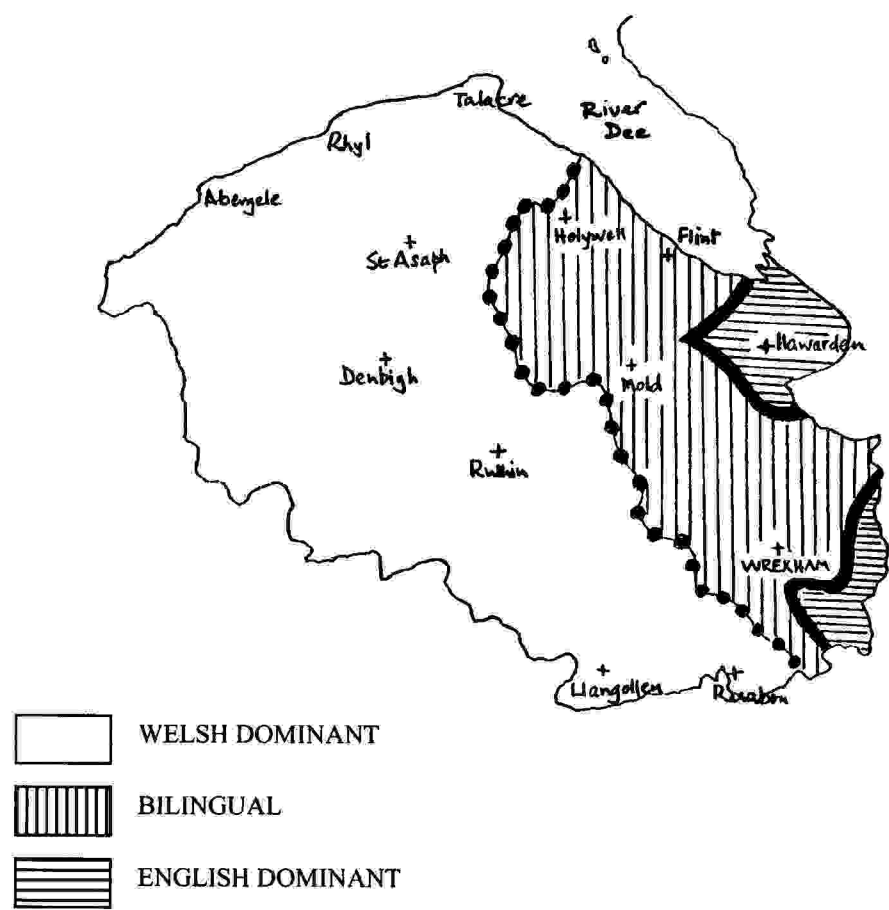
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270 P. O'Leary, 2000, op. cit., pp.306 - 307.

271 M. Hickman in Swift and Gilley, (eds.) *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension* (Dublin), 1999, pp.252 - 253.

272 N. J. E. Danaher, *The Irish in Leicester, c. 1841 to c. 1891*, Ph.D. thesis, North London 1999.

FIGURE 22: Principal language divides in North - East Wales, 1846.



Source: W.T.R. Pryce, op. cit. (1971), Figure 82.

Irish disorderliness was the most public and sensitive area of differences between the Irish and their hosts. However, to focus upon 'disturbance' as an inherent feature would seem to invite the classification of the Irish as a violent minority within a peaceable community; nevertheless, such was the perception of many of their contemporaries. As Swift has said,

The study of Irish disorders, both intra-communal and inter-communal, not only remains one of the most useful means of delineating varieties of Irish-ness and the strength of Irish identities....but provides a useful vehicle for exploring notions and charting communal tensions.<sup>273</sup>

An indication that the Irish in North-East Wales were perceived as being in the local community, but not entirely of it, was contained in two reports of the Holywell Petty Sessions which appeared in the *Flintshire Observer*, 1864. They demonstrated diverging attitudes on the Bench towards the Irish in the town. One report was entitled 'An Irish Riot in Bagillt', the other 'An Irish Quarrel'. The first case resulted in seven days in Flint jail for the main protagonists, John Rush and William Flynn, while the second cost Bridget Conlon and Bridget Gallagher eleven shillings each. Aside from punishments meted out, the cases are of interest for the light thrown upon local attitudes towards Irish comportment. The chairman of the Bench on the first occasion commented on the 'very good behaviour which of late years has been displayed by the Irish fraternity of Holywell'.<sup>274</sup> In the case of the brawling women, the chairman took a contrary view and said that 'they – the Irish people of the town – were continually in some row or other'.<sup>275</sup> What was important

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273 R. E. Swift, 'Historians and the Irish', in *Immigrants and Minorities* (2000), p.25

274 *Flintshire Observer*, 8 April 1864.

275 *Flintshire Observer*, 15 July 1864.

was the fact that both magistrates saw the Irish as discrete elements in the community.

The attitudes of the Holywell magistrates may have reflected different opinions about Irish behaviour in 1864, but Irish behaviour went in cycles and local reaction to it varied. On one occasion, the *Wrexham Advertiser* reported Mr Bradshaw, Superintendent of Police, ‘...the conduct of the Irish in the town had been of late disgraceful in the extreme. He had never seen so much drunkenness in our streets, as he had among the Irish on Sunday week’.<sup>276</sup> Six months later, the paper contained the following quote, ‘..... although there has been a great increase of the Hibernian population - who are notorious for quarrelling - our streets on the whole present a very orderly and peaceable appearance.’<sup>277</sup> Matters had obviously improved upon the situation eight years earlier when a correspondent had written, ‘Nearly every night, the fighting and swearing and cursing and shrieking that obtains in Tuttle Street, before and after midnight, shock and alarm the more respectable inhabitants.’<sup>278</sup> From 1850 to 1880, the *Wrexham Advertiser* reported little Irish disorder other than drunkenness, street fighting and neighbours’ disputes. There were no outbreaks of inter- or intra- communal violence as was the case in Wolverhampton and Cumbria and no mass conflict such as occurred in Tredgar in 1882 when the Irish were driven from their houses. No open wage-related resentment between the Welsh and Irish was reported, nor violence such as the Mold Riot of 1869. This was the most violent episode in the mining history of North

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<sup>276</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 12 January 1861.

<sup>277</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 26 July 1861.

<sup>278</sup> Letter from R. Humphreys Jones, *Wrexham Advertiser*, 1 January 1852, quoted in S. Irish, Ph.D. thesis, (Wales), 1987, p.203.

Wales, involving the ‘packing-off’ of individual colliery managers and unpopular groups such as Moch Môn (Anglesey Pigs)<sup>279</sup> However, the Irish as a group were never involved in industrial conflict. The practice of ‘packing-off’ was in the tradition of direct action against those who offended against community mores and values. In the north of England there was ‘riding the stang’, in the South-West the Skimmington, while in Wales such ‘rough music’ included the ‘ceffyl pren’. This custom was intended to embarrass and browbeat its victims and involved a procession headed by a wooden horse. The leaders of this crowd had blackened faces and were dressed as animals or women (Shades of the Rebecca Riots and the Scotch Cattle).<sup>280</sup> Obloquy was heaped upon the transgressor’s head. The ‘Ceffyl Pren’ was employed in Bangor-on-Dee in 1866 and was still evident in Anglesey even in the 1850s. In Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1895 a Cadwalladr Hughes, a Salvationist, was paraded about the streets in a donkey cart, accused of visiting an immoral house.<sup>281</sup> Such practices represented the popular concept of order, as opposed to the official; formal adjudication in a court of law was expensive and could permanently damage harmonious relations within a society. These informal measures gradually disappeared, hastened in their demise by the emergence of associations for the prosecution of felons - such as those in St Asaph, Whitford near Holywell, Rhiwabon and Corwen - and the growth of police forces.

Migrant workers, of whose number many were Irish, were frequently blamed for crime. They lived in an unbalanced and rootless ‘society’, whose gratifications consisted largely of drinking, fighting and thieving. Inevitably, the migrants - and

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279 *The Mold Riots*, (Clwyd Record Office, Hawarden, 1991).

280 G. A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Penguin, 1985), pp.192-194.

281 D. J.V. Jones, (1992), op. cit., p.12.

along with them the Irish navvies - suffered calumny: in Bala, in 1881, a construction contract ended, but there was local reluctance to return augmented police numbers to previous levels because 'the greatest transgressors were natives not navvies',<sup>282</sup>

From 1860-1892, almost half of the prisoners in Welsh jails were born in Wales, more than 30% in England and fewer than 20% were Irish born.<sup>283</sup> TABLE 37 shows that during the period 1856 – 1892, between 1.11% and 2.18% of the Irish-born population in Wales, 1856 - 1892, produced between 10% and 19% of Welsh prison inmates. By comparison, English-born prisoners ranged from 21% to 30% over the same period. Welsh-born prisoners made up between 49% and 61%.

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282 D. J. V. Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth Century Wales*, (Cardiff), 1992, p.183.

283 *ibid*, p.182.



Table 38: The contribution of the Irish-born to Welsh crime, 1856 – 92.

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4			
Year	Population of Wales	Irish-born in Wales	% of Irish-born in Wales	Nos. and % of English - Welsh - Irish-born in Welsh jails.			
					E	W	I
1851	1,163,139	20,730	1.78	1856	22% (628)	58% (1,643)	15% (429)
1861	1,280,413	28,089	2.18	1860	24% (791)	49% (1,627)	19% (613)
1871	1,412,583	22,007	1.56	1872	21% (927)	57% (2,567)	16% (722)
1881	1,71,780	22,872	1.46	1880	21% (1,101)	61% (3,234)	12% (654)
1891	1,771,451	19,613	1.11	1892	30% (1,602)	56% (2,986)	10% (526)
Source: J. Williams, Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics, Vol. I (1985)		Source: Census Returns, quoted in O' Leary (2000), p.314.		Source: O' Leary (2000), Appendix IV, p.316.			

Once more, minorities have greater local significance than it would seem from overall historical statistics. In 1860, 75% of all English-born prisoners were to be found in Glamorganshire. Anglesey, Cardiganshire and Radnorshire - all very rural counties - had 36% of their prison population born in England and Ireland, while some county jails had but 25%. ‘Even so, the prominence of these outsiders in the statistics was greater than their share in the population as a whole, a fact which strengthened Henry Richard’s claim that the worst crimes in the principality were executed by outsiders’.<sup>284</sup> (Throughout this period, 1856 to 1892, there were three males prisoners to every one female in Welsh jails with, coincidentally, males reaching their highest percentage, 77%, in 1864 and 1868, the two years when

284 *ibid.*, p.183. See also footnote 112, Chapter 2.

the females were at their lowest, 23%. Females were at their highest percentage in 1860 and 1884 when, as though on a penitential see-saw, males were at their lowest).<sup>285</sup>

The Irish made their appearance in the regular reports of the magistrates' courts proceedings, but no more it would seem, than any other definable group given to similar public behaviour, for example, Welsh miners or farm workers. They were variously included under such headings in the press columns as 'Noisy and Turbulent' (27 June 1857); 'Irish Slasher' (28 December 1857); 'An Irish Mêlée' (24 April 1858); 'A large Mob' (23 June 1867). The main Irish misdemeanours were disorderliness and stealing. There was one incident of counterfeiting shillings and half-crowns (15 January 1859), an enterprise rewarded with twelve months' hard labour. On 16 May 1859, a Michael Cuddy was charged with allowing men and women to sleep in the same lodging-house room, 'a more dirty house' the police inspector said he never saw'.

The nearest one comes to sectarian conflict in Wrexham, 1850 to 1860, was an assault on 12 July 1858 - Orange Day itself - when a Michael Mayley, an Irish Protestant, was stabbed in Tuttle Street. The victim claimed that as a Protestant he was always being 'picked on' by Irish Catholics. Otherwise, the *Advertiser's* main concern was with 'The Irish Brigade' causing 'disgraceful riots' associated with 'weddings and christenings', like the incident on 22 May 1859 which resulted in fines of one shilling with six shillings costs, for each of eight defendants. Irish misdemeanour in nearby Chester was similarly dominated by violence, larceny and

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285 *ibid.*, p.171, Table 11; O'Leary (2000). p.316, Appendix IV.

disorderliness. The Chester Police Court records for 1851, 1861 and 1871 gave the Irish as between 27% and 33% of those charged with offences against the person and between 19% and 34% of those charged with being drunk and disorderly. Gambling and begging were the other main pastimes of the Cestrian Irish.<sup>286</sup>

The records of the Denbighshire Quarter Sessions show that between 1 July 1851 and 4 January 1877, 1,702 cases were dealt with.<sup>287</sup> Addresses and places of origin were not recorded so that one is reduced to reliance upon family names as an indication of Irish involvement: 61 as defendants and 14 as prosecutors. Most were charged with larceny, only two, in 1876, with assault upon the person. There was a 'surge' of cases involving Irish names between 1862 and 1864, the annual average rising to 6.3, with a further 'peak' from 1875 to 1877 when the average went up to four. Penal servitude was given in five cases, from six to seven years, the convicted having previous criminal records. There was an echo, albeit faint, of O'Leary's observation (previously noted in Chapter Two) that in the Glamorganshire Quarter Sessions, the nature of Irish crime appeared to change as the century progressed.<sup>288</sup> In Glamorgan, 1845 to 1855, the Irish stole essentials like food, clothing and fuel; by 1865 to 1875, they were involved in counterfeiting and violence. In the Denbighshire Quarter Sessions, 1851 to 1856, the Irish featured as thieves of bread, shoes and shirts, but by 1876 grievous bodily harm and common assault were listed among their accomplishments.

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286 H. T. Peavitt, *The Irish, Crime and Disorder in Chester, 1841 – 1871*, University of Liverpool, Ph.D. (2000).

287 Denbighshire Q.S. Record Book, 1844 - 1877, County Record Office, Ruthin, QSD/SS/1 (Prosecutions)

288 P. O'Leary, Ph.D. thesis (Wales), 1989, op. cit. - an observation modified in *Immigration and Integration*, (2000), p.184.

The depiction of the Irish as feckless, disorderly, drunken and thieving no doubt had its origin in xenophobia. In Wales, however, such distrust received a boost in 1847, namely the anger sparked by the Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales. The three commissioners were English barristers, who, with no knowledge of the country or its language, made gratuitous criticism of Welsh morals and cited a connection between Nonconformism and immorality. It was claimed that chapel prayer meetings led to loss of chastity. The Welsh, it seemed from the report, were immoral, licentious, obscene, unchaste and 'it took many years to recover from the stinging rebukes of the commissioners' report.<sup>289</sup> The 'evidence' for the condemnation came largely from clergy of the Established church, which, to the Nonconformists, was an Anglican treachery; hence the 'Treachery of the Blue Books' as the 1847 report came to be known.<sup>290</sup> Nonconformists reacted but not always temperately: any weakness in the Welsh character they claimed must have been due to the dilution by immigration. The influx of English and Irish labourers in North-East and South-East Wales had obliterated 'the peculiar characteristics of the Welsh labourer' and, by 1881, swollen the crime figures to give a distorted notion of Welsh criminality.<sup>291</sup>

The Irish had a bad reputation in the towns along the North Wales coast - Holyhead, Caernarfon, Bangor - and in Brynsiencyn on Anglesey 'the characteristic surnames Sweeney, Riley, McNally and Kelly' cropped up regularly in criminal records.<sup>292</sup> The crime statistics for North-East and South-East counties of Wales

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289 G. Ellis, 'A Nation Condemned for its Immorality' in *Country Quest*, April 1984, pp.14-15.

290 'Brad y Llyfrau Gleision'. See O'Leary, (2000), op. cit. p. 163.

291 O'Leary, *ibid.* p. 165, quoting Thos. Rees (1867) and T. D. Jones (1881).

292 D. J. V. Jones, op. cit. p.184.

were frequently omitted from counter-arguments on the grounds that immigration had created lawlessness. Wales would indeed have been 'the land of white gloves' had it not been for the immigrants, especially the Irish variety, infecting these benighted, industrialised border counties.

Such was the stance taken by apologists and commentators: the Welsh had got into bad company. What was the reality? The recorded birthplaces of Welsh prisoners in Welsh prisons showed that, from 1856 to 1892, the Irish-born were most numerous in 1868 with 1,023 or 20.2% of the prison population. The highest number reached by English-born prisoners was in 1892 (1,602 or 30.2%). For all but two years, 1860 and 1868, the Welsh-born accounted for slightly less than 50%, but for all other years appreciably more than half.<sup>293</sup> In counting only Irish-born however, these figures could well have under-counted the extent of Irish crime. The police were involved in poor relief and public health regulations, areas where they would encounter many indigent Irish: such close scrutiny may well have led to proportionately more prosecutions for petty theft, matters that would not have been pursued in other areas. The very establishment of police forces, such as that of Denbighshire in 1840, brought with it a need for justification and an urge for force enlargement and in this Irish cooperated through their traditional faction fighting and weekend escapist drinking habits; they were an easy target.

Vagrancy was another *bête noire* of Victorian society. Tramps were answerable to no one, paid no dues and, far from being seen as free spirits, were regarded as subversive of social order. It was noted in the previous chapter that Flintshire Chief Constable called them 'tramping locusts'. The Famine Irish were, of

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293 P. O'Leary (2000), Appendix IV, p.316.

course, prominent among their number, both men and women, but vagrancy was by no means confined to the Irish or to the mid-century. Mr Kemp, the master of the Wrexham Workhouse, did not single out the Irish in his evidence to parliamentary inspectors in 1848:

‘....vagrants, as a class, deserve but little pity, and ought rather to be under cognizance of the police than the poor law officer. They are, for the most part, if not criminals, at least, on the verge of crime.... Outcast from society, knowing no home, counting all men their enemies.’<sup>294</sup>

The reporting inspector, W. D. Boase, however, did finger the Irish, classifying vagrants as ‘English tramps, young urban outcasts and the Irish’<sup>295</sup> The Report noted that, at the entrances to Bangor, notices were posted which warned that vagrants and beggars would receive no relief; would be issued with tickets to the workhouse and risked arrest for begging.<sup>296</sup> Denbigh, Holywell, Mold and Wrexham were on a through route for the thousands moving between Lancashire, Cheshire and Wales, a fact reflected in the towns’ outdoor relief lists. At Mold, March to October 1867 and June to October 1870, 709 were relieved, of whom 128, or 18%, were Irish-born, and ten percent Welsh-born.<sup>297</sup> There were times when vagrancy was more acute, for example, the 1830s, the early and late 1840s, the 1860s the late 1870s, the early 1880s and the early 1890s.<sup>298</sup> Work was not always easy to find for the vagrant, especially for the Irish during the Famine years and times of economic depression such as the 1870s. One result of this was that, during the summer months,

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294 P.P., 1850, XXVII, Poor Law Report, p.99.

295 R. Samuel, ‘Comers and Goers’ in Dyos and Wolff, (eds.) *The Victorian City*, Vol. 1, (1973)

296 P. P. 1850, XXVII, pp.112-113.

297 Flintshire Record Office.

298 D. J. V. Jones, ‘A Dead Loss to the Community: the Criminal Vagrant in Mid-nineteenth century Wales’ in *Welsh History Review*, 8/3, June 1977, pp.312-343.

women and children were left at Welsh ports in the care of the authorities while the men moved on to England. The female hawker and the begging widow became a familiar sight in coastal parishes.<sup>299</sup>

In the popular mind, the vagrant was filthy, scrounging and evilly-disposed; in the official mind, he was 'the most obvious antithesis of the Victorian trinity of work, respectability and religion.'<sup>300</sup> In both minds, private and public, the vagrant was a threat, bringing disease, crime and immorality to a respectable, God-fearing, Nonconformist nation; an attitude confirmed by the nationality of most of the tramps - English, Scottish and, of course, Irish. Welshmen who turned vagrant were condemned bitterly; but they were few, for most took their 'apostasy' east of Offa's Dyke.<sup>301</sup> Given the general suspicion of the stranger and fear of the vagrant, it is probable that such an underclass was wrongly blamed for much local misdemeanour. Such crimes as were committed by vagrants often had their origin in poverty and Poor Law policy and administration; plus a desire to be convicted. On a bitter winter's night, a jail was a better place to be than a hedge-bottom: the Famine Irish, of all people, would have known this, (See F. Neal's *Black '47*, especially Chapter 7). Tearing one's clothes in a workhouse could accomplish such incarceration. In May 1867, John O'Donner received one month's hard labour for doing this in Swansea Workhouse and fourteen days' labour were awarded to John Dooley and William Kearney for a similar offence in Corwen Workhouse in 1886.<sup>302</sup> Vagrants in Dolgellau Workhouse also tore their clothes and burned their beds, whilst in the Holywell Workhouse, two 'Refractory Vagrants' - Murphy and McGuinness -

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299 D. J. V. Jones, *ibid.*, p.317.

300 *ibid.*, p.312.

301 D. P. Jones, *Welsh County Characteristics*, (1952), p.139, quoted by Jones *ibid.*, p.312.

302 P. O'Leary, (2000), *op. cit.*, p.177.

committed the same offence.<sup>303</sup> With the vagrant came the threat of arson. By the 1860s, a wave of burning had reached serious dimensions in the eastern counties of North Wales.<sup>304</sup> The offences had common characteristics: they were committed by groups of vagrants, usually English or Irish; they involved property in small areas; their perpetrators pleaded guilty, even though innocent. Rick-burning could be the response to a refusal of food or shelter, or even harsh words: William Brannan received eight years' penal servitude for burning a rick at Montgomery, while Thomas Riley fired a stack at Leighton, near Welshpool.<sup>305</sup> A haystack at Northop, Flintshire, was burned in August 1864 because a vagrant had not been admitted to the local workhouse. Wrexham, in particular, suffered from arson in 1863, perhaps as a result of the imposition of a labour test and refusal of relief to the 'vagrant fraternity': at the Denbighshire Spring Assizes four prisoners were sentenced to six years' penal servitude. Prostitution was another area where the Irish were considered to be deeply involved. This was largely an urban problem and Irish neighbourhoods were deemed to be at the heart of it, although the evidence is contradictory. However, the assumption that the Irish were heavily implicated had little evidence to support it, in North-East Wales at least. It was noted in Chapter Two that in Merthyr Tydfil in 1859 to 1860, of the town's forty prostitutes, only six were Irish whereas twenty-three were Welsh. Magistrates often told the women up before them to leave town. In Caernarfon in 1878, Mary McNally, charged with being drunk and disorderly, was given the choice between three months' jail or leaving town.<sup>306</sup> Ellen Hogan, also in Caernarfon, was jailed for a week, but defiantly told the bench that

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303 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 19 January 1868; 15 June 1867.

304 D. J. V. Jones, op. cit., p.335.

305 *ibid.*, p.336.

306 P. O'Leary, (2000), op. cit. p.181.



prostitution in the streets was a result of outlawing brothels.<sup>307</sup> Despite her assertion, Home Office records showed that, in 1880, six houses of 'bad character' were known to operate in Holywell's Pennyball Street, with two in New Road, Rhyl, and three in St Asaph's Irish Square.<sup>308</sup> This last is situated between the cathedral and the Dean's house - a kind of diocesan oversight - but which came first, the Irish or the square's name, is not known. The majority of prostitutes in Wales were to be found in southern redoubts like Merthyr Tydfil's 'China', the stamping ground of such characters as 'Big Jane' Thomas and 'Buffalo' Margaret Evans. However, by 1860, there were pockets of prostitutes in Holywell and Caernarfon.<sup>309</sup>

Crime, vagrancy and prostitution represented the antithesis of Victorian respectability and the Irish, it was believed, were given to all three. The police were eager to be seen controlling public order, drunkenness and petty crime and so concentrated on working-class neighbourhoods. The Irish lived in such areas and inevitably appeared prominently in the crime figures. The 'land of the white gloves', smarting under the criticism of the 1847 Blue Books, was anxious for its reputation and was eager to heap blame upon any group which did not share its respectable Nonconformist values and practices. The Irish - poor, starving, diseased and Catholic - served well as whipping boy.

In one sense, Irish criminality was acceptable as long as it stayed amiable; that is, kept within its stereotype. Paddy had to be feckless, stupid and fighting drunk; only then would he be allowed his obverse side - chaste, generous and witty.

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307 *ibid.*, p.181.

308 D. J. V. Jones, (1992), *op. cit.*, p.189.

309 *ibid.*, p.190

Straying into politics of religion, he could expect a hardening of anti-Irish attitudes<sup>310</sup>

The Irish were as stupid in Welsh-language jokes of the period as they were in the English music hall.<sup>311</sup> Such a condition the Irish might have exploited, especially before the bench, portraying themselves as misguided fools not to be taken seriously: court jesters, as it were. On 19 March 1860 at the magistrates' court in Wrexham, Patrick Higgins would not agree to be sworn in, but dropped to his knees, unbuttoned his waistcoat and performed certain ceremonies. He was admonished 'in the language of the Green Isle'<sup>312</sup> Peter Judge, charged with being drunk and disorderly after the funeral of his cousin, blamed a friend who had come over from Ireland 'with a quantity of whiskey to keep up the wake'.<sup>313</sup> Milking an anti-Celtic stereotype could also be done in editorial columns. At national level, *Punch* spoke of simian 'Irish Savages'<sup>314</sup> and at local level, the *Wrexham Advertiser* managed a double slur on the French and the Irish: The French Assembly had a truly Celtic and characteristic setting on Tuesday last, The scene could not have been more unseemly, and violent had an infusion of Irish wake been added....<sup>315</sup> Two birds with one stone.

Fifteen years after the Famine came an episode which brought forth the gamut of reaction to the Irish in the locality - the Fenian Raid on Chester Castle<sup>316</sup>

310 S. Gilley, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1780 -1900' in C. Holmes (ed.) *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society*, (London), 1978, pp.81.

311 P. O'Leary, (2000), p. 182.

312 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 24 March 1860.

313 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 27 June 1857.

314 *Punch*, 18 October 1862.

315 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 5 April 1873.

316 For further details see: D. M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750 - 1922*, (London, 1999), pp.140 - 141; J. Loughlin, 'Fenianism' in *Oxford Companion to Irish History*, (O.U.P. 1999), pp.189 -190; T. W. moody (ed.), *The Fenian Movement* (1968); J. Newsinger, *Fenianism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (1994); F.D1. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, (London, 1971), pp. 136 -137,

This reaction had, of course, its wider context. Rumours of republicanism were heard in Wales from time to time during the 1860s. Pro-Irish organisations appeared early in the decade, one of the most notable being the National Brotherhood of St Patrick which aimed at nurturing Irish identity through political and cultural activities. It was opposed by the Catholic Church for it required sworn allegiance to a body other than the church itself; there was also a degree of anti-clericalism in the Brotherhood's ethos. The main centre of the Brotherhood's engagement was in South Wales where numbers and the, as yet, immature organisational structure of the Catholic Church necessitated the use of non-Irish priests to minister to the Irish Catholic population, '.... by 1864, there were more Italian than Irish priests in Wales, with a smattering of Welsh, English, Dutch and Breton clergy filling the ranks.'<sup>317</sup> The Brotherhood was not without its supporters among the clergy and some dissension arose in the clerical values. However, the Establishment prevailed and the Brotherhood had all but disappeared by 1865. Moran has said that 'the Brotherhood's greatest obstacle was the condemnation by the Catholic Church, which claimed it was a secret society'.<sup>318</sup> The Brotherhood was viewed askance by the Church and by moderate nationalists, and taken over by the Fenians.

In 1867, the Welsh press was handed more than enough material to demonstrate the alienation of the Irish from their host society. In February came the raid on the Chester Castle, in September the Manchester escape with its subsequent martyrs, and in December the Clerkenwell bombing. Precautionary measures by police forces in South Wales were taken - and fully reported - and with the arrest and

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317 P. O'Leary, (2000), p.246.

318 G. Moran, 'The National Brotherhood of Saint Patrick in Lancashire' in Swift and Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the Local Dimension* (Dublin, 1999), pp.212 - 235.

trial of suspects came the enrolment of additional special constables. Alarm at the Fenians was also to be found in North Wales. Even in Merioneth with its very small number of Irish-born, popular ballads contained references to Irish rebels and traitors.<sup>319</sup> The Manchester rescue was narrated in a Welsh ballad which lamented the hanging of the Fenians Allen, Gould and Larkin and the shooting of the policeman, Brett. The hanged deserved their fate, the ballad said, and they served as an example to those who would abuse the 'sacred' laws of the realm. To avoid such a punishment, folks should 'revere the Queen, listen to her words and always submit to the Crown of England' (sic).<sup>320</sup>

Chester and Manchester were near enough to North-East Wales to impart an immediacy to reporting and comment in the local press. Alarms and rumours were duly reported throughout February and March. A police superintendent followed from Holywell to Chester 'a suspected Fenian officer, beating a hasty retreat after the failure of the Chester plot'.<sup>321</sup> Large numbers of Fenians were said to be marching from Chester to Holyhead where two suspicious craft were sighted offshore, no doubt waiting to convey the rebels to Ireland. A gunboat was dispatched from the Mersey to observe the boat's movements.<sup>322</sup> On 16 February, the *Wrexham Advertiser* wondered if success at Chester Castle would have hastened the Fenians' downfall and, indeed, if a wish to spread alarm had been their main aim rather than military success in the raid. Had the whole affair been a government hoax, a ruse to allow a demonstration of how quickly troops could be mobilised? By 23 February

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319 O'Leary (2000), p.253.

320 T. Jones, 'Ufudd-dod yn Barhaus: Welsh Broadside Ballads and the Irish Question', *Planet*, 33 (1976), p.17.

321 *Wrexham Advertiser*, 14 February 1867.

322 *ibid.*, 14 February 1867.

the editorial was commenting that the ‘base and wicked’ Fenians could influence the ‘hot-brained but harmless’ and that such subversive agitation was the work of paid agents to draw subscriptions from the ‘warm-hearted and patriotic, but misguided Irish inhabitants of the United States’. The Dublin correspondent of *The Times* was quoted as saying that the Fenians could not count either on the support of the peasants or on the defection of the constabulary; that troops could be rapidly deployed to deal with insurrection; and that the Irish were sure to be betrayed from their own ranks.<sup>323</sup> This last reassurance that there was nothing to be feared from an enemy inherently treacherous was reinforced in humorous ‘fillers’ in the paper’s columns. *Punch* was quoted: ‘True Fenian bonds - a good pair of handcuffs’,<sup>324</sup> while on 2 March 1867, ‘London Sayings and Doings’ remarked’ ..... if any Fenian were sentenced to be roasted, there would be another Fenian found to turn the spit.’ In many stories, the Irish - fanatical Fenians apart - were portrayed as childlike and amusing. On 27 February 1867, ‘Mock Fenians’ ran a sub-heading in the *Wrexham Advertiser*, reporting an incident in Llangollen:

.....large numbers of boys, with sticks in their hands, making a great uproar, and declaring that they were of the above detested brotherhood, and were bent on taking the town and Castle Dinas Bran ... P. C. Reeves made his appearance, and gave chase, and like their ‘compatriots’ at Chester the sight of the glazed hat scattered the daring insurrectionists in all directions.

Such mockery was of a piece with a general attitude towards the Irish which was expressed in the *Wrexham Advertiser* on 15 February 1868: ‘Jottings from Judy - By y’r leave, why do Irishmen resemble the waves of the Atlantic? Because they never cease lavin’ the shores of the ould counthry’. The local press maintained its anti-

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<sup>323</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 2 March 1867.

<sup>324</sup> *Wrexham Advertiser*, 15 February 1868.

Fenian stance but could only report incidents in metropolitan cities and retail comments made in other publications.

In the decades following the Great Famine, the flow of Irish into and through North-East Wales increased. A degree of social disorientation occurred, manifesting itself in poverty, vagrancy and petty crime - areas in which the Irish were given an exaggerated role. Yet organised mob violence between the host society and the migrants did not occur - certainly not on the scale of that seen from time to time in South Wales and Midlands towns; nor did sectarian conflict. There were comparatively few Irish in North-East Wales and even fewer Protestant Irish for the majority had their origins in predominantly Catholic areas of Ireland. Green and Orange sectarian differences were therefore infrequent and at an interpersonal level. If therefore the tensions between Irish men were largely absent, the Irish in this area may well have missed the bonding that can come from 'robust and competing senses of Irishness'.<sup>325</sup> The 'Irishness' of North-East Wales was therefore not so sharply defined as that of, say nineteenth-century Cumbria, a factor that may have contributed to easier relations with the host society. However, if sectarian violence did not occur, street disorder did. Drunken brawling and petty theft, followed by zealous policing of poor district, ensured that the Irish appeared regularly before the local magistrate, for it was in such poor streets that the majority of Irish lived. Naturally, the Welsh saw crime on their streets as deriving from immigrants. Nonconformists had been linked to immorality and, in repudiation of this charge, the Welsh sought to lay blame upon the strangers in their midst: 'hungry generations' fleeing the Famine, bringing with them vagrancy, prostitution, disease, poverty, lawlessness, treachery and, of course, Catholicism.

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325 D. M. MacRaid, (1998), *op. cit.*, p.203.

So, to some extent, the Irish were regarded as different, in part because of their disorderly behaviour. However, others saw things differently. A critical note was struck by a Denbigh Assize Judge when he observed 'that it would be much better if the Welsh people would employ themselves learning to speak English instead of getting drunk and quarrelling'.<sup>326</sup> This found an echo some thirty years later when Lord Justice Brett cast doubt upon the 'whiteness' of the gloves presented to him at the Grand Juries of Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire: 'as I believe it (crime) does exist, though, by some means it is not brought before me; my congratulations must assume a modified form'.<sup>327</sup> Nevertheless, nineteenth-century Wales, compared with say, continental countries, was not a land of great crimes or large-scale violence, but of common assaults and petty misdemeanours.<sup>328</sup> This was also the style of the Irish in North-East Wales.

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<sup>326</sup> *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 30 March 1850.

<sup>327</sup> D. J. V. Jones, (1992), *op. cit.*, p.3.

<sup>328</sup> *ibid.*, p.239.

## SUMMARY

This chapter began with speculations concerning the nature and membership of a community. Was there an Irish community in North-East Wales, 1851 – 1881, and was it perceived as integrated or segregated? In fact, a person belongs to many ‘communities’ at the same time: the larger community bound together by location and a common legal system and the smaller, more immediate groups of family, friends, neighbours. Between, there are associations such as church, schools, occupation, clubs, linguistic fellowship, common place of origin. (This last was always important to the Welsh – the ‘bro’ or where one comes from). Two of the main check points between the primary hosts and secondary communities in North-East Wales – Church and education – yielded a picture tending towards separation, while interdenominational marriage showed a gradual blurring of the line between the Irish and their hosts. At the other point of contact – crime and disorder – the host was only too willing to put the blame on the Irish. However, this is an oversimplified picture for the perceptions were often at odds with reality. There is need of qualifying detail, unfortunately limited, so that many aspects of the liaison between migrant and host must pass without comment. Ambiguities remain for, where personal material is thin, it is difficult to get under the skin of a place. Official records usually lack nuance, while press reports have passed through an editorial prism; nevertheless, the census and local newspapers often remain the only sources to hand.

In sum, then: ignorance of Welsh in this bilingual area did not hinder the assimilation of the Irish; Catholicism probably did. The Irish acquired sufficient Welsh to function at work, but their Catholicism differentiated them in a largely Nonconformist Community. The local press sneered at ‘Romish performances’ and



found the advancement of Catholic schooling a constant irritation. During the Fenian disturbances of the 1860s, the Irish were viewed with suspicion to the point that, in Wrexham, the local priest felt constrained to protest his congregation's loyalty. An increasing rate of intermarriage did little in the early years of the post – Famine period to ameliorate anti-Catholic feeling: it was not until the following century that commentators could claim a substantial rapprochement between the Welsh and Irish. However, by contrast with South Wales, the relationship between the two peoples were amiable: the inter-communal antagonism of the South Wales not seen in the North-East; nor were Irish crime and disorder found on such a scale. Numbers were significant in this. Despite their local prominence, the Irish in the North-East were comparatively few and their offences largely petty, often treated as comical in court. Over the years, the Irish outlived their 'difference'. A low profile was their greatest asset on the path of integration; it also enabled them to retain some elements of an Irish identity.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## CONCLUSION

The large towns and cities of Britain bore the brunt of nineteenth-century Irish immigration but the Irish influx into Wales had its own characteristics. A little over fifty percent of the Irish population of Wales was to be found in four towns, all in South Wales, while the remainder were in villages. In Wales therefore, not all Irish permanently exchanged a rural for an urban environment. Again, Britain as a whole showed a gradual decline in the number of its Irish-born after the mid-century whereas the Irish-born in Wales maintained their numbers until the turn of the century: a longer-lasting immigration. Furthermore, the Irish in Wales were not so numerous as the English but they attracted most hostility, as though having to learn at least a functional Welsh were not obstacle enough to survival in a 'foreign' land. Finally, most Irish in Wales were Catholic, most Welsh were Nonconformists. Such a potential impediment to integration between migrant and host did not generally exist in an England growing evermore secular. Here then, are reasons to regard Wales as a distinctive area for Irish immigration.

To extend a trope employed earlier; 'For Wales, see South Wales'. For most Welsh historians, Wales stopped just north of Merthyr Tydfil. Until the appearance of Paul O'Leary's *The Irish in Wales, 1798 – 1922*, there was no volume dedicated to the subject and even this is concerned mainly with South Wales. For instance, the index has over fifty entries for Merthyr and over seventy each for Cardiff and Newport. On the other hand, Wrexham in North-East Wales has fourteen entries, Mold one and Holywell and Flint none at all. Admittedly, South Wales overshadowed other parts of Wales in terms of population growth, industry and commerce and deserves most attention. However, the focus upon the 'shock' cities of the 1830s and 1840s hid the experience of the Irish in the smaller towns and villages, experience brought to light by recent research. This thesis, in seeking to

quantify and interpret the experience of the Irish migrant in an area largely neglected in the historiography, has attempted to tease out a new dimension in the story of the Irish in Wales. North-East Wales offered a less crowded canvas to portray the interaction between the Irish and their hosts – smaller numbers, less labour conflict, less denominational hostility; in short, a portrait in miniature and muted colours. A corollary of this has been a comparative paucity of source material and the need has been great to rely heavily on official sources such as census returns and parliamentary papers. Personal comment such as that found in correspondence has not been readily available and there is a particular dearth of systematic evidence of the experience of second and third generation Irish.

The Irish in North-East Wales had a local significance which belied their total numbers and although they were not confined in ghettos, they had their own streets and neighbourhoods; or such was the local perception. The small numbers of Irish in North-East Wales did not permit the formation of ‘Little Irelands’. This lack of size and numbers allowed ‘ethnic fade’ to span the generations less rancorously than in the South; as it were, there were no lumps of ‘Irishness’ to dissolve before the more general stirring took place. (Not that stereotypes grew less potent, especially when it came to crime: in his novel, *Rhys Lewis* (1885), the Mold tailor, Daniel Owen, portrayed the Irishman as relatively poor and rootless). Ethnic fade was aided by the growth, albeit slow, of the Irish middle class and the entry of the Irish into the more skilled occupations, some even making a success of marine store dealing and small shopkeeping. The obverse of this was that such upward mobility widened the gap between the respectable and the ‘low’ Irish and confirmed the host society’s poor opinion of the latter. However, by 1881, full ethnic integration had not arrived on the scene; it had to wait until the next century. Catholicism marked off the Irish from

the Nonconformists, but where trade unionism had not developed sufficiently to offer the Irish male an opportunity for work—orientated allegiance, intermarriage between the Irish and their hosts was a force for integration.

However, although South Wales was the scene of vast economic change and social upheaval during the nineteenth century, it must not be assumed that North-East Wales was a ‘sleepy hollow’, a quiet backwater where the Irish and other immigrants could paddle along unnoticed. The period 1642 – 1780 in Wales has been described by one historian as one which

....witnessed a marked growth in population, agrarian improvements, the development of heavy industries, fresh market opportunities, improved communications, swelling trade, significant urban growth, striking advances in the provision of educational facilities and the growth of literacy, the emergence of Methodism, the rejuvenation of Dissent, and revival of Welsh culture.<sup>329</sup>

North-East Wales had its share of all these developments, plus civil disturbance and labour troubles in the years up to 1850 and beyond. However, the Irish did not play a prominent part in these disturbances, even in Flint with its sudden injection of Irish into the town. A more distinguishing characteristic was slow absorption into the community where they remained a silent minority.

The most ‘dramatic’ locations for the acting—out of the Irish story in North-East Wales were, of course, Wrexham and Flint. The former was the town with a varied economy and commercial structure; the latter was the ‘boom’ town dominated by a single industry and in need of plentiful unskilled labour. (Mold had settled into

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329 G.H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales, 1642 – 1780* (O.U.P. 1993), p. vi.

being a market town with localised sphere of influence, a place where the Irish were few and scarcely visible. Holywell was changing its role in the area, developing its financial and professional services following the demise of its textile and engineering interests in the Greenfield Valley). In Wrexham, there were clearly defined Irish areas – mainly of poor housing – but no ghettos; in Flint, the phenomenon of chain migration was most clearly in evidence, with whole streets filled with immigrants from a particular place in Ireland. The Irish in Wrexham were generally those ‘pushed’ by the desire to escape economic disadvantage in Ireland; the Irish in Flint were generally those ‘pulled’ by employment opportunities. This is borne out by the Ireland–North-East Wales axis: Wrexham’s Irish in the main originated in Connacht, then part of Ireland most seriously hit by the Great Famine,<sup>330</sup> while those of Flint came more from ‘mainland’ Britain, for example, South Lancashire and Cheshire, in response to increased job opportunities.

Mobility was indeed a defining feature of the Irish in the earlier years, although in three of the towns they settled down as the period progressed. Flint was again odd man out: the Irish were increasing their mobility by 1881. In the three decennial periods from 1851 to 1881, the average number of Irish-born, in – and – out migrants in the four towns showed a distinct slowing–down in Wrexham, a gradual decline in Mold and Holywell, but a steep upward movement in Flint.

In all four towns and their districts, the Catholic church had small beginnings characterised by self-help and patronage. Richard Thompson, the iron founder, in Wrexham and the Mostyn family in Flintshire were prime movers in establishing

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330 See C. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, (Dublin, 1994), pp.176 and 369.

their churches with church appointees taking over at a later date. Worship, which began in public houses and private rooms, eventually came to be housed in purpose – built churches. Catholic schooling began in similar fashion, initial patronage being followed by institutional administration, the Mostyn – sponsored school at Talacre and the assumption of St Mary’s School in Wrexham by order of nuns being examples.

The Catholic Church provided a focus for much Irish life in the four towns, perhaps more so for women than men. There were few opportunities for women in heavy industry so that female work tended to be of the ‘domestic’ type such as laundering, out –work in textiles. Only later in the century did ‘retailing’ for women appear in the census returns. The church enabled women to meet others and to transmit Irish identity. However, intermarriage pre-supposed a social contact with groups outside the church, so that Irish Catholics could not have been completely isolated or so beleaguered as the anti – Catholic stance of the local press implied.

The main motif of this study has been Irish integration in the society of North-East Wales. Were they part of or apart from their communities? The fact that Irishness remained an identifiable quality would seem to imply that assimilation did not take place; however assimilation need not mean total loss of identity. Though not numerous, the Irish were present in the area before 1850 so that chain migration and local dispersal were always probable. Nearby Cheshire and South Lancashire most certainly had their Irish populations. Yet it is significant that Wrexham and Flint did not have their highest numbers of Irish immediately following the Great Famine, but in 1871 and 1881, while in Mold and Holywell the numbers of Irish declined from 1851. This indicated that North-East Wales was not deluged by those

fleeing the Famine but acquired its strongest Irish flavour from later generations, many of whom had arrived from other parts of Britain than Ireland. The numbers of Irish in each town at any one time were never high enough to be a cause of social imbalance. They stood out by virtue of their local concentrations, their reputation for disorderliness and petty crime, their religion; the attitude of their hosts, particularly the anti-Catholic stance of the local press, may also have helped to prolong their Irishness.

This said, their Irishness contained contradictions. They were not a homogeneous group: many were labourers, but an increasing number were semi-skilled; some were skilled and some professional. In church membership, there was less diversity. The Catholic Irish were overshadowed – and perhaps, by virtue of this, thrown together more closely – by the Protestant denominations. On the morning of 31 March 1851, when the Religious Census was taken, there were in Wrexham, Mold and Holywell approximately six Nonconformists and four Anglicans to every Catholic.<sup>331</sup> Their Catholicism might have proved a difficulty in certain aspects of community life – John Beirne’s election as Mayor of Wrexham in 1876 was an instance of this – and the ‘Nonconformist’ press was usually willing to denigrate the faith, but, slowly and despite high mobility among their numbers, a coalescence with the local society was achieved.

The Irish were a distinctive, if not especially prominent, people in North-East Wales at this time and, as elsewhere in Britain, they had many of the qualities of aliens. For some historians, the Irish migrants were a beleaguered minority who

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<sup>331</sup> Source: Religious Census, 1851.



remained outcast from the mainstream of British society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries;<sup>332</sup> for others, they had, by 1900, shaken off their past and assumed British values.<sup>333</sup> Fitzpatrick has been more circumspect, assigning the Irish to a 'curious, middle place'. However, such evaluations are largely based on the perspectives of urban areas like Liverpool where the dynamics of Irish migrant life were very different from those in smaller towns like Wrexham and Mold. Numbers are significant here: clear and sustained segregation from a host society requires substantial membership of the group. What may have been fashioned in Liverpool in 1851 with its Irish-born population of 83,813<sup>334</sup> could have been done only in miniature, or not at all, in North-East Wales towns with their few hundreds of Irish. Here, in a reduced context, the Irish would have had to react to small, local stimuli, for they would not have been numerous enough to dominate spheres of activity. They may have gained control over dock labour in Liverpool, but two or three of their country cousins in, say, a Wrexham brewery could hardly have established an Irish-only closed shop. Furthermore, there would have to be clear benefits to be gained for continued segregation to have been worthwhile and sufficient numbers to sustain it. Conversely, integration would have had to be clearly beneficial for the Irish to embrace it. Integration was the more likely phenomenon because it required less energy and determination to achieve and, with a mobile and comparatively low migrant population, community membership was virtually inevitable, not to say politic. Consequently, while there may have been Irish quarters in the North-East Wales towns based on a variety of factors - common birthplace, family connections -

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332 J. Belchem, 'Freedom and Friendship to Ireland', *International Review of History*, 39, 1994. See also D. M. MacRaild, 1998, op. cit., passim, where the 'assimilation perspective' is questioned by reference to the sectarian flavour of Cumbrian Irish life.

333 J. Walvin, *Passage to Britain*, 1984, op. cit., p.58.

334 C. Pooley, in Swift and Gilley (eds.) 1989, p.66.

they were small and fluid in their boundaries. Moreover, in culture, the area's Welshness was disappearing, improved communications having made inroads, especially along the coast. Holiday resorts for England's industrial North-West were growing — Prestatyn, Rhyl, Llandudno - with their demand for labour in the service industries. The process of Anglicisation was in train, with a progressive westward migration of the cultural frontier as the area fell 'into the vast devouring orbit of the Merseyside conurbation'.<sup>335</sup> What role did the Irish play in this? Let Flint in the 1860s and 1870s be a paradigm. The Irish, those most mobile and responsive of migrants, were straws in the wind, the vanguard of later economic and cultural invaders. Besides, as slum clearance proceeded and suburbia grew, people of whatever origin were dispersed and their population was thus culturally diluted.<sup>336</sup> As the century moved on and while the pace of in-migration increased, total segregation became impossible.

(Had the Irish in North — East Wales been more numerous and Protestant rather than a Catholic minority, and had the area been more Welsh in culture and less Nonconformist, could a 'Celtic' bond have developed between the Welsh and the Irish? Belchem points to 'competing and conflicting inflexions' of celticism in Liverpool and sees such tensions 'at the very centre of the multinational United Kingdom'.<sup>337</sup> Certainly, for reasons of language, religious denomination, social and economic status, no Welsh - Irish bond was forged in Liverpool,<sup>338</sup> and this in, an English city with a 'disproportionate Celtic presence'.<sup>339</sup> However, Liverpool was not

335 J.A. Taylor, 'The Northern Borderland' in E.G. Bowen, (ed.), *Wales, a Physical, Historical and Regional Geography*, (London, 1957), p.458.

336 Social experiments in the form of model villages were also tried, for example, Acton Park, Spring Lodge and High Town in Wrexham in the period, 1900 - 1926. Flint, restricted by the River Dee, grew in the tract between the Chester and Northop Roads and to the north-west.

337 J. Belchem, *Merseypride*, (L.U.P.), 2000, pp.xii - xvii

338 *ibid.*, p.44.

339 *ibid.*, p.xiii.

the native territory of either the Welsh or the Irish for both were in – migrants there and a comparison between the city and North – East Wales as sites of Celtic interaction is not entirely appropriate. In North – East Wales, the Welsh, although by this time much Anglicised, were on their home ground and the Irish were the incomers: their relationship was different from that found in Liverpool. There was a gradual coalescence of Welsh and Irish in the area, but no coalition of Celts).

The thematic approach of this study has highlighted the numbers of Irish, their settlement areas and social structure, their occupations, their degrees of mobility and the extent of their absorption into the larger community. In essence therefore:

(a) From 1851 to 1881, the Welsh counties with little industry declined in population. Even in those with industry, there were local shifts: for instance, in the four North-East Wales towns, only in Flint – and for economic reasons – did the Irish population increase, so that by 1871 the Irish represented 11% of the population of the town. In Wrexham and Holywell, the percentage of Irish in these populations were similar to those found in South Wales, that is, approximately seven percent. Local relative figures were of more importance than total numbers, affecting as they did the manner in which the Irish were perceived by the indigenous populations.

(b) Such perception was affected by the comparative ‘visibility’ of the Irish. Though relatively few in number, their ‘clustering’ in streets and enclaves made the Irish appear a ‘horde’. Their distinct areas of poor quality housing in all four towns were often labelled as Irish quarters. Ghettos they were not, for not all Irish were confined there, nor were all their inhabitants Irish, and, as the century progressed, there was ‘seepage’ into other areas where the Irish were by no means dominant.

Furthermore, not all Irish were impoverished and without hope: the McDermotts of Wrexham prospered.

(c) Indeed, examination of the occupational classifications of Wrexham showed that, by 1871, the Irish were becoming upwardly mobile: 87% of the Irish workforce were in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs (Classes IV and V) compared with 96% of Wrexham's workforce as a whole. In the older-established towns, the Irish were well in evidence in the higher echelons of the economy, to be joined in Flint in 1881 by 19% of the town's Irish workforce: a rapid rise in keeping with the character of the town.

(d) There was a steady rate of mobility among the Irish in three of the towns with a sharp influx into Flint in the 1860s and 1870s. Most Irish immigrants had originated in Connacht and arrived in North-East Wales at a secondary stage, having spent some time elsewhere in Britain. As the period advanced, the Irish settled down, often to be joined by second and third generation immigrants.

(e) A wish to retain Irish identity may be read into the growth of the Catholic Church and the accompanying development of Catholic schooling, both issues which sparked adverse comment in the local press. However, as a counter to this, intermarriage between Irish Catholics and local Protestants indicated a leaning towards integration. In the main, Irish disorder displayed no deep-seated hostility towards the host society and was treated as petty disturbance. The Welsh language presented no serious barrier to integration and, over the years, a low profile assisted the process of assimilation, at the same time helping those Irish who wished to keep at least some of their Irish identity.

Since c. 1990, there has been a shift of emphasis in the historiography of the Irish in nineteenth – century Britain. The concentration on the Irish in the large cities has cast a blanket over the whole story of Irish migration to Britain, a blanket which has now been drawn back to reveal a great variety to the Irish migrant experience. The undoubted impact of the Irish influx on, say, Liverpool and Manchester was not the whole story and the regions and small towns are being shown to have been as much the setting of Irish migration as were the large cities and ports of entry. This was especially so for second and third generation Irish who were to be found in significant numbers in such places as Stafford, Cumbria, Macclesfield and Camborne. The small – scale studies based on these regional and local contexts provide a necessary counterpoint to the themes laid down by historians of the Irish experience in conurbations such as London and Glasgow. So it is with Wales, where it has seemed that the Irish were in evidence overwhelmingly in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea with little presence elsewhere. This study has attempted to show that the Irish encounter with North-East Wales, 1851 to 1881, while not so well–documented as their experience in the south of the country, should not be neglected and can indeed contribute to the developing national picture of the Irish in nineteenth–century Britain.

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